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THE WRITINGS OF BRET HARTE

IN NINETEEN VOLUMES

VOLUME VI

Burns
96

The boat approaches a black hulk

Stories of California and the Frontier

THE CRUSADE OF THE EXCELSIOR

And Other Tales

BY

BRET HARTE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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THE CRUSADE OF THE EXCELSIOR AND OTHER TALES

THE CRUSADE OF THE EXCELSIOR

PART I. IN BONDS

CHAPTER I

A CRUSADER AND A SIGN

It was the 4th of August, 1854, off Cape Corrientes. Morning was breaking over a heavy sea, and the closely-reefed topsails of a barque that ran before it bearing down upon the faint outline of the Mexican coast. Already the white peak of Colima showed, ghostlike, in the east; already the long sweep of the Pacific was gathering strength and volume as it swept uninterruptedly into the opening Gulf of California.

As the cold light increased, it could be seen that the vessel showed evidence of a long voyage and stress of weather. She had lost one of her spars, and her starboard davits rolled emptily. Nevertheless, her rigging was taut and shipshape, and her decks scrupulously clean. Indeed, in that uncertain light, the only moving figure besides the two motionless shadows at the wheel was engaged in scrubbing the quarter-deck — which, with its grated settees and stacked camp-chairs, seemed to indicate the presence of cabin passengers. For the barque Excelsior, from New York to San

Francisco, had discharged the bulk of her cargo at Callao, and had extended her liberal cabin accommodation to swell the feverish Californian immigration, still in its height.

Suddenly there was a slight commotion on deck. An order, issued from some invisible depth of the cabin, was so unexpected that it had to be repeated sternly and peremptorily. A bustle forward ensued, two or three other shadows sprang up by the bulwarks, then the two men bent over the wheel, the Excelsior slowly swung round on her heel, and, with a parting salutation to the coast, bore away to the northwest and the open sea again.

"What's up now?" growled one of the men at the wheel to his companion, as they slowly eased up on the helm.

"'T ain't the skipper's, for he 's drunk as a biled owl, and ain't stirred out of his bunk since eight bells," said the other. "It 's the first mate's orders; but I reckon it 's the señor's idea."

"Then we ain't goin' on to Mazatlan?"

"Not this trip, I reckon," said the third mate, joining them.

"Why?"

The third mate turned and pointed to leeward. The line of coast had already sunk enough to permit the faint silhouette of a trail of smoke to define the horizon line of sky.

"Steamer goin' in, eh?"

"Yes. D' ye see — it might be too hot, in there!"

"Then the jig 's up?"

"No. Suthin' 's to be done — north of St. Lucas. Hush!"

He made a gesture of silence, although the conversation, since he had joined them, had been carried on in a continuous whisper. A figure, evidently a passenger, had appeared on deck. One or two of the foreign-looking crew who had

drawn near the group, with a certain undue and irregular familiarity, now slunk away again.

The passenger was a shrewd, exact, rectangular-looking man, who had evidently never entirely succumbed to the freedom of the sea either in his appearance or habits. He had not even his sea legs yet; and as the barque, with the full swell of the Pacific now on her weather bow, was plunging uncomfortably, he was fain to cling to the stanchions. This did not, however, prevent him from noticing the change in her position, and captiously resenting it.

"Look here — you; I say! What have we turned round for? We 're going away from the land! Ain't we going on to Mazatlan?"

The two men at the wheel looked silently forward, with that exasperating unconcern of any landsman's interest peculiar to marine officials. The passenger turned impatiently to the third mate.

"But this ain't right, you know. It was understood that we were going into Mazatlan. I 've got business there."

"My orders, sir," said the mate curtly, turning away.

The practical passenger had been observant enough of sea-going rules to recognize that this reason was final, and that it was equally futile to demand an interview with the captain when that gentleman was not visibly on duty. He turned angrily to the cabin again.

"You look disturbed, my dear Banks. I trust you haven't slept badly," said a very gentle voice from the quarter-rail near him; "or perhaps the ship's going about has upset you. It 's a little rougher on this tack."

"That 's just it," returned Banks sharply. "We *have* gone about, and we 're not going into Mazatlan at all. It 's scandalous! I 'll speak to the captain — I 'll complain to the consignees — I 've got business at Mazatlan — I expect letters — I" —

"Business, my dear fellow?" continued the voice, in gentle protest. "You 'll have time for business when you get to San Francisco. And as for letters — they 'll follow you there soon enough. Come over here, my boy, and say hail and farewell to the Mexican coast — to the land of Montezuma and Pizarro. Come here and see the mountain range from which Balboa feasted his eyes on the broad Pacific. Come!"

The speaker, though apparently more at his ease at sea, was in dress and appearance fully as unnautical as Banks. As he leaned over the railing, his white, close-fitting trousers and small patent-leather boots gave him a jaunty, half-military air, which continued up to the second button of his black frock coat, and then so utterly changed its character that it was doubtful if a greater contrast could be conceived than that offered by the widely spread lapels of his coat, his low turned-down collar, loosely knotted silk handkerchief, and the round, smooth-shaven, gentle, pacific face above them. His straight long black hair, shining as if from recent immersion, was tucked carefully behind his ears, and hung in a heavy, even, semicircular fringe around the back of his neck where his tall hat usually rested, as if to leave his forehead meekly exposed to celestial criticism. When he had joined the ship at Callao, his fellow-passengers, rashly trusting to the momentary suggestion of his legs on the gang-plank, had pronounced him military; meeting him later at dinner, they had regarded the mild Methodistic contour of his breast and shoulders above the table, and entertained the wild idea of asking him to evoke a blessing. To complete the confusion of his appearance, he was called "Señor" Perkins, for no other reason, apparently, than his occasional but masterful use of the Spanish vernacular.

Steadying himself by one of the quarter stanchions, he waved his right hand oratorically towards the sinking coast.

"Look at it, sir. One of the finest countries that ever came from the hand of the Creator; a land overflowing with milk and honey; containing, sir, in that one mountain range, the products of the three zones — and yet the abode of the oppressed and down-trodden; the land of faction, superstition, tyranny, and political revolution."

"That's all very well," said Banks irritably, "but Mazatlan is a well-known commercial port, and has English and American correspondents. There's a branch of that Boston firm — Potter, Potts & Potter — there. The new line of steamers is going to stop there regularly."

Señor Perkins's soft black eyes fell for an instant, as if accidentally, on the third mate, but the next moment he laughed, and, throwing back his head, inhaled, with evident relish, a long breath of the sharp, salt air.

"Ah!" he said enthusiastically, "*that's* better than all the business you can pick up along a malarious coast. Open your mouth and try to take in the free breath of the glorious North Pacific. Ah! isn't it glorious?"

"Where's the captain?" said Banks, with despairing irritation. "I want to see him."

"The captain," said Señor Perkins, with a bland, forgiving smile and a slight lowering of his voice, "is, I fear, suffering from an accident of hospitality, and keeps his state-room. The captain is a good fellow," continued Perkins, with gentle enthusiasm; "a good sailor and careful navigator, and exceedingly attentive to his passengers. I shall certainly propose getting up some testimonial for him."

"But if he's shut up in his state-room, who's giving the orders?" began Banks angrily.

Señor Perkins put up a small, well-kept hand deprecatingly.

"Really, my dear boy, I suppose the captain cannot be omnipresent. Some discretion must be left to the other officers. They probably know his ideas and what is to be

done better than we do. You business men trouble yourselves too much about these things. You should take them more philosophically. For my part I always confide myself trustingly to these people. I enter a ship or railroad car with perfect faith. I say to myself, 'This captain, or this conductor, is a responsible man, selected with a view to my safety and comfort; he understands how to procure that safety and that comfort better than I do. He worries himself; he spends hours and nights of vigil to look after me and carry me to my destination. Why should *I* worry myself, who can only assist him by passive obedience? Why'" — But here he was interrupted by a headlong plunge of the Excelsior, a feminine shriek that was half a laugh, the rapid patter of small feet and sweep of flying skirts down the slanting deck, and the sudden and violent contact of a pretty figure.

The next moment he had forgotten his philosophy, and his companion his business. Both flew to the assistance of the fair intruder, who, albeit the least injured of the trio, clung breathlessly to the bulwarks.

"Miss Keene!" ejaculated both gentlemen.

"Oh dear! I beg your pardon," said the young lady, reddening, with a naïve mingling of hilarity and embarrassment. "But it seemed so stuffy in the cabin, and it seemed so easy to get out on deck and pull myself up by the railings; and just as I got up here, I suddenly seemed to be sliding down the roof of a house."

"And now that you're here, your courage should be rewarded," said the señor, gallantly assisting her to a settee, which he lashed securely. "You are perfectly safe now," he added, holding the end of the rope in his hand to allow a slight sliding movement of the seat as the vessel rolled. "And here is a glorious spectacle for you. Look! the sun is just rising."

The young girl glanced over the vast expanse before her

with sparkling eyes and a suddenly awakened fancy that checked her embarrassed smile, and fixed her pretty, parted lips with wonder. The level rays of the rising sun striking the white crests of the lifted waves had suffused the whole ocean with a pinkish opal color ; the darker parts of each wave seemed broken into facets instead of curves, and glittered sharply. The sea seemed to have lost its fluidity, and become vitreous ; so much so, that it was difficult to believe that the waves which splintered across the Excelsior's bow did not fall upon her deck with the ring of shattered glass.

"Sindbad's Valley of Diamonds !" said the young girl, in an awed whisper.

"It 's a cross sea in the Gulf of California, so the mate says," said Banks practically ; "but I don't see why we" —

"The Gulf of California ?" repeated the young girl, while a slight shade of disappointment passed over her bright face ; "are we then so near" —

"Not the California you mean, my dear young lady," broke in Señor Perkins, "but the old peninsula of California, which is still a part of Mexico. It terminates in Cape St. Lucas, a hundred miles from here, but it 's still a far cry to San Francisco, which is in Upper California. But I fancy you don't seem as anxious as our friend Mr. Banks to get to your journey's end," he added, with paternal blandness.

The look of relief which had passed over Miss Keene's truthful face gave way to one of slight embarrassment.

"It has n't seemed long," she said hastily ; and then added, as if to turn the conversation, "What is this peninsula ? I remember it on our map at school."

"It 's not of much account," interrupted Banks positively. "There ain't a place on it you ever heard of. It 's a kind of wilderness."

"I differ from you," said Señor Perkins gravely. "There are, I have been told, some old Mexican settlements along the coast, and there is no reason why the country should n't be fruitful. But you may have a chance to judge for yourself," he continued beamingly. "Since we are not going into Mazatlan, we may drop in at some of those places for water. It 's all on our way, and we shall save the three days we would have lost had we touched Mazatlan. That," he added, answering an impatient interrogation in Banks's eye, "at least, is the captain's idea, I reckon." He laughed, and went on still gayly, "But what 's the use of anticipating? Why should we spoil any little surprise that our gallant captain may have in store for us? I 've been trying to convert this business man to my easy philosophy, Miss Keene, but he is incorrigible; he is actually lamenting his lost chance of hearing the latest news at Mazatlan, and getting the latest market quotations, instead of offering a thanksgiving for another uninterrupted day of freedom in this glorious air."

With a half humorous extravagance he unloosed his already loose necktie, turned his Byron collar still lower, and squared his shoulders ostentatiously to the sea breeze. Accustomed as his two companions were to his habitually extravagant speech, it did not at that moment seem inconsistent with the intoxicating morning air and the exhilaration of sky and wave. A breath of awakening and resurrection moved over the face of the waters; recreation and new-born life sparkled everywhere; the past night seemed forever buried in the vast and exundating sea. The reefs had been shaken out, and every sail set to catch the steadier breeze of the day; and as the quickening sun shone upon the dazzling canvas that seemed to envelop them, they felt as if wrapped in the purity of a baptismal robe.

Nevertheless, Miss Keene's eyes occasionally wandered from the charming prospect towards the companion-ladder.

Presently she became ominously and ostentatiously interested in the view again, and at the same moment a young man's head and shoulders appeared above the companion-way. With a bound he was on the slanting deck, moving with the agility and adaptability of youth, and approached the group. He was quite surprised to find Miss Keene there so early, and Miss Keene was equally surprised at his appearance, notwithstanding the phenomenon had occurred with singular regularity for the last three weeks. The two spectators of this gentle comedy received it as they had often received it before, with a mixture of apparent astonishment and patronizing unconsciousness, and, after a decent interval, moved away together, leaving the young people alone.

The hesitancy and awkwardness which usually followed the first moments of their charming isolation were this morning more than usually prolonged.

"It seems we are not going into Mazatlan, after all," said Miss Keene at last, without lifting her conscious eyes from the sea.

"No," returned the young fellow quickly. "I heard all about it down below, and we had quite an indignation meeting over it. I believe Mrs. Markham wanted to head a deputation to wait upon the captain in his berth. It seems that the first officer, or whosoever is running the ship, has concluded we've lost too much time already, and we're going to strike a bee-line for Cape St. Lucas, and give Mazatlan the go-by. We'll save four days by it. I suppose it don't make any difference to you, Miss Keene, does it?"

"I? Oh, no!" said the girl hastily.

"*I*'m rather sorry," he said hesitatingly.

"Indeed. Are you tired of the ship?" she asked saucily.

"No," he replied bluntly; "but it would have given us four more days together — four more days before we separated."

He stopped, with a heightened color. There was a

moment of silence, and the voices of Señor Perkins and Mr. Banks in political discussion on the other side of the deck came faintly. Miss Keene laughed.

"We are a long way from San Francisco yet, and you may think differently."

"Never!" he said impulsively.

He had drawn closer to her, as if to emphasize his speech. She cast a quick glance across the deck towards the two disputants, and drew herself gently away.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, with a charming smile which robbed the act of its sting, "I sometimes wonder if I am *really* going to San Francisco. I don't know how it is; but, somehow, I never can *see* myself there."

"I wish you did, for *I*'m going there," he replied boldly.

Without appearing to notice the significance of his speech, she continued gravely: —

"I have been so strongly impressed with this feeling at times that it makes me quite superstitious. When we had that terrible storm after we left Callao, I thought it meant that — that we were all going down, and we should never be heard of again."

"As long as we all went together," he said, "I don't know that it would be the worst thing that could happen. I remember that storm, Miss Keene. And I remember" — He stopped timidly.

"What?" she replied, raising her smiling eyes for the first time to his earnest face.

"I remember sitting up all night near your state-room, with a cork jacket and lots of things I'd fixed up for you, and thinking I'd die before I trusted you alone in the boat to those rascally Lascars of the crew."

"But how would you have prevented it?" asked Miss Keene, with a compassionate and half-maternal amusement.

"I don't know exactly," he said, coloring; "but I 'd have lashed you to some spar, or made a raft, and got you ashore on some island."

"And poor Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Brimmer — you 'd have left them to the boats and the Lascars, I suppose?" smiled Miss Keene.

"Oh, somebody would have looked after Mrs. Markham; and Mrs. Brimmer would n't have gone with anybody that was n't well connected. But what 's the use of talking?" he added ruefully. "Nothing has happened, and nothing is going to happen. You will see yourself in San Francisco, even if you don't see *me* there. You 're going to a rich brother, Miss Keene, who has friends of his own, and who won't care to know a poor fellow whom you tolerated on the passage, but who don't move in Mrs. Brimmer's set, and whom Mr. Banks would n't indorse commercially."

"Ah, you don't know my brother, Mr. Brace."

"Nor do you, very well, Miss Keene. You were saying, only last night, you hardly remembered him."

The young girl sighed.

"I was very young when he went West," she said explanatorily; "but I dare say I shall recall him. What I meant is, that he will be very glad to know that I have been so happy here, and he will like all those who have made me so."

"Then you have been happy?"

"Yes; very." She had withdrawn her eyes, and was looking vaguely towards the companion-way. "Everybody has been so kind to me."

"And you are grateful to all?"

"Yes."

"Equally?"

The ship gave a sudden forward plunge. Miss Keene involuntarily clutched the air with her little hand, that

had been resting on the settee between them, and the young man caught it in his own.

"Equally?" he repeated, with an assumed playfulness that half veiled his anxiety. "Equally — from the beaming Señor Perkins, who smiles on all, to the gloomy Mr. Hurlstone, who smiles on no one?"

She quickly withdrew her hand, and rose. "I smell the breakfast," she said laughingly. "Don't be horrified, Mr. Brace, but I 'm very hungry." She laid the hand she had withdrawn lightly on his arm. "Now help me down to the cabin."

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER PORTENT

THE saloon of the Excelsior was spacious for the size of the vessel, and was furnished in a style superior to most passenger-ships of that epoch. The sun was shining through the sliding windows upon the fresh and neatly arranged breakfast-table, but the presence of the ominous "storm-racks," and partitions for glass and china, and the absence of the more delicate passengers, still testified to the potency of the Gulf of California. Even those present wore an air of fatigued discontent, and the conversation had that jerky interjectional quality which belonged to people with a common grievance, but a different individual experience. Mr. Winslow had been unable to shave. Mrs. Markham, incautiously and surreptitiously opening a porthole in her state-room for a whiff of fresh air while dressing, had been shocked by the intrusion of the Pacific Ocean, and was obliged to summon assistance and change her dress. Jack Crosby, who had attired himself for tropical shore-going in white ducks and patent leathers, shivered in the keen north-west Trades, and bewailed the cheap cigars he had expected to buy at Mazatlan. The entrance of Miss Keene, who seemed to bring with her the freshness and purity of the dazzling outer air, stirred the younger men into some gallant attention, embarrassed, however, by a sense of self-reproach.

Señor Perkins alone retained his normal serenity. Already seated at the table between the two fair-headed children of Mrs. Brimmer, he was benevolently performing

parental duties in her absence, and gently supervising and preparing their victuals even while he carried on an ethnological and political discussion with Mrs. Markham.

"Ah, my dear lady," continued the señor, as he spread a hot biscuit with butter and currant jelly for the youngest Miss Brimmer, "I am afraid that, with the fastidiousness of your sex, you allow your refined instincts against a race who only mix with ours in a menial capacity to prejudice your views of their ability for enlightened self-government. That may be true of the aborigines of the Old World — like our friends the Lascars among the crew" —

"They 're so snaky, dark, and deceitful looking," interrupted Mrs. Markham.

"I might differ from you there, and say that the higher blonde types like the Anglo-Saxon — to say nothing of the wily Greeks — were the deceitful races; it might be difficult for any of us to say what a sly and deceitful man should be like" —

"Oor not detheitful — oor a dood man," interpolated the youngest Miss Brimmer, fondly regarding the biscuit.

"Thank you, Missie," beamed the señor; "but to return: our Lascar friends, Mrs. Markham, belong to an earlier Asiatic type of civilization already decayed or relapsed to barbarism, while the aborigines of the New World now existing have never known it — or, like the Aztecs, have perished with it. The modern North American aborigine has not yet got beyond the tribal condition; mingled with Caucasian blood as he is in Mexico and Central America, he is perfectly capable of self-government."

"Then why has he never obtained it?" asked Mrs. Markham.

"He has always been oppressed and kept down by colonists of the Latin races; he has been little better than a slave to his oppressor for the last two centuries," said Señor Perkins, with a slight darkening of his soft eyes.

"Injins is pizen," whispered Mr. Winslow to Miss Keene.

"Who would be free, you know, the poet says, ought themselves to light out from the shoulder, and all that sort of thing," suggested Crosby, with cheerful vagueness.

"True; but a little assistance and encouragement from mankind generally would help them," continued the señor. "Ah! my dear Mrs. Markham, if they could even count on the intelligent sympathy of women like yourself, their independence would be assured. And think what a proud privilege to have contributed to such a result, to have assisted at the birth of the ideal American Republic, for such it would be — a Republic of one blood, one faith, one history."

"What on earth, or sea, ever set the old man off again?" inquired Crosby in an aggrieved whisper. "It 's two weeks since he 's given us any Central American independent flapdoodle — long enough for those nigger injins to have had half a dozen revolutions. You know that the vessels that put into San Juan have saluted one flag in the morning, and have been fired at under another in the afternoon."

"Hush!" said Miss Keene. "He 's so kind! Look at him now, taking off the pinafores of those children and tidying them. He is kinder to them than their nurse, and more judicious than their mother. And half his talk with Mrs. Markham now is only to please her, because she thinks she knows politics. He 's always trying to do good to somebody."

"That 's so," exclaimed Brace, eager to share Miss Keene's sentiments; "and he 's so good to those outlandish niggers in the crew. I don't see how the captain could get on with the crew without him; he 's the only one who can talk their gibberish and keep them quiet. I've seen him myself quietly drop down among them when they were

wrangling. In my opinion," continued the young fellow, lowering his voice somewhat ostentatiously, "you 'll find out when you get to port that he 's stopped the beginning of many a mutiny among them."

"I reckon they 'd make short work of a man like him," said Winslow, whose superciliousness was by no means lessened by the community of sentiment between Miss Keene and Brace. "I reckon his political reforms and his poetical high-falutin' would n't go as far in the forecastle among live men as it does in the cabin with a lot of women. You 'll more likely find that he 's been some sort of steward on a steamer, and he 's working his passage with us. That 's where he gets that smooth, equally-attentive-to-anybody sort of style. The way he skirmished around Mrs. Brimmer and Mrs. Markham with a basin the other day when it was so rough convinced *me*. It was a little too professional to suit my style."

"I suppose that was the reason why you went below so suddenly," rejoined Brace, whose too sensitive blood was beginning to burn in his cheeks and eyes.

"It 's a shame to stay below this morning," said Miss Keene, instinctively recognizing the cause of the discord and its remedy. "I 'm going on deck again — if I can manage to get there."

The three gentlemen sprang to accompany her; and, in their efforts to keep their physical balance and hers equally, the social equilibrium was restored.

By noon, however, the heavy cross-sea had abated, and the Excelsior bore west. When she once more rose and fell regularly on the long, rhythmical swell of the Pacific, most of the passengers regained the deck. Even Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb ventured from their state-rooms, and were conveyed to and installed in some state on a temporary divan of cushions and shawls on the lee side. For even in this small republic of equal cabin passengers the

undemocratic and distinction-loving sex had managed to create a sham exclusiveness. Mrs. Brimmer, as the daughter of a rich Bostonian, the sister of a prominent lawyer, and the wife of a successful San Francisco merchant, who was popularly supposed to be part owner of the Excelsior, was recognized, and alternately caressed and hated, as their superior. A majority of the male passengers, owning no actual or prospective matrimonial subjection to those charming toad-eaters, I am afraid continued to enjoy a mild and debasing equality among themselves, mitigated only by the concessions of occasional gallantry. To them Mrs. Brimmer was a rather pretty, refined, well-dressed woman, whose languid pallor, aristocratic spareness, and utter fastidiousness did not, however, preclude a certain nervous intensity which occasionally lit up her weary eyes with a dangerous phosphorescence, under their brown fringes. Equally acceptable was Miss Chubb, her friend and traveling companion; a tall, well-bred girl, with faint salmon-pink hair and complexion, that darkened to a fiery brown in her short-sighted eyes.

Between these ladies and Mrs. Markham and Miss Keene existed an enthusiastic tolerance, which, however, could never be mistaken for a generous rivalry. Of the greater popularity of Miss Keene as the recognized belle of the Excelsior there could be no question; nor was there any from Mrs. Brimmer and her friend. The intellectual preëminence of Mrs. Markham was equally, and no less ostentatiously, granted. "Mrs. Markham is so clever; I delight to hear you converse together," Mrs. Brimmer would say to Señor Perkins, "though I 'm sure I hardly dare talk to her myself. She might easily go into the lecture-field — perhaps she expects to do so in California. My dear Clarissa" — to Miss Chubb — "don't she remind you a little of Aunt Jane Winthrop's governess whom we came so near taking to Paris with us, but could n't on account of her defective French?"

When "The Excelsior Banner and South Sea Bubble"

was published in lat. 15 N. and long. 105 W., to which Mrs. Markham contributed the editorials and essays, and Señor Perkins three columns of sentimental poetry, Mrs. Brimmer did not withhold her praise of the fair editor. When the Excelsior "Recrossed the Line," with a suitable tableau vivant and pageant, and Miss Keene as California, in white and blue, welcomed from the hands of Neptune (Señor Perkins) and Amphitrite (Mrs. Markham) her fair sister, Massachusetts (Mrs. Brimmer), and New York (Miss Chubb), Mrs. Brimmer was most enthusiastic of the beauty of Miss Keene.

On the present morning Mr. Banks found his disappointment at not going into Mazatlan languidly shared by Mrs. Brimmer. That lady even made a place for him on the cushions beside her, as she pensively expressed her belief that her husband would be still more disappointed.

"Mr. Brimmer, you know, has correspondents at Mazatlan, and no doubt he has made particular arrangements for our reception and entertainment while there. I should not wonder if he was very indignant. And if, as I fear, the officials of the place, knowing Mr. Brimmer's position — and my own connections — have prepared to show us social courtesies, it may be a graver affair. I should n't be surprised if our Government were obliged to take notice of it. There is a captain-general of port — is n't there? I think my husband spoke of him."

"Oh, he 's probably been shot long ago," broke in Mr. Crosby cheerfully. "They put in a new man every revolution. If the wrong party 's got in, they 've likely shipped your husband's correspondent too, and might be waiting to get a reception for you with nigger soldiers and ball cartridges. Should n't wonder if the skipper got wind of something of the kind, and that 's why he did n't put in. If your husband had n't been so well known, you see, we might have slipped in all right."

Mrs. Brimmer received this speech with the languid obliviousness of perception she usually meted out to this chartered jester.

"Do you really think so, Mr. Crosby? And would you have been afraid to leave your cabin — or are you joking? You know I never know when you are. It is very dreadful, either way."

But here Miss Chubb, with ready tact, interrupted any possible retort from Mr. Crosby.

"Look," she said, pointing to some of the other passengers, who, at a little distance, had grouped about the first mate in animated discussion. "I wonder what those gentlemen are so interested about. Do go and see."

Before he could reply, Mr. Winslow, detaching himself from the group, hurried towards them.

"Here 's a row: Hurlstone is missing! Can't be found anywhere! They think he 's fallen overboard!"

The two frightened exclamations from Miss Chubb and Mrs. Brimmer diverted attention from the sudden paleness of Miss Keene, who had impulsively approached them.

"Impossible!" she said hurriedly.

"I fear it is so," said Brace, who had followed Winslow; "although," he added in a lower tone, with an angry glance at the latter, "that brute need not have blustered it out to frighten everybody. They 're searching the ship again, but there seems no hope. He has n't been seen since last night. He was supposed to be in his state-room — but as nobody missed him — you know how odd and reserved he was — it was only when the steward could n't find him, and began to inquire, that everybody remembered they had n't seen him all day. You are frightened, Miss Keene; pray sit down. That fellow Winslow ought to have had more sense."

"It seems so horrible that nobody knew it," said the young girl, shuddering; "that we sat here laughing and

talking, while perhaps he was — Good heavens! what 's that?"

A gruff order had been given: in the bustle that ensued the ship began to fall off to leeward; a number of the crew had sprung to the davits of the quarter boat.

"We 're going about, and they 're lowering a boat, that 's all; but it 's as good as hopeless," said Brace. "The accident must have happened before daylight, or it would have been seen by the watch. It was probably long before we came on deck," he added gently; "so comfort yourself, Miss Keene, you could have seen nothing."

"It seems so dreadful," murmured the young girl, "that he was n't even missed. Why," she said, suddenly raising her soft eyes to Brace, "*you* must have noticed his absence; why, even I" — She stopped with a slight confusion, that was, however, luckily diverted by the irrepressible Winslow.

"The skipper 's been routed out at last, and is giving orders. He don't look as if his hat fitted him any too comfortably this morning, does he?" he laughed, as a stout, grizzled man, with congested face and eyes, and a peremptory voice husky with alcoholic irritation, suddenly appeared among the group by the wheel. "I reckon he 's cursing his luck at having to heave-to and lose this wind."

"But for a human creature's life!" exclaimed Mrs. Markham in horror.

"That 's just it. Laying-to now ain't going to save anybody's life, and he knows it. He 's doin' it for show, just for a clean record in the log, and to satisfy you people here, who 'd kick up a row if he did n't."

"Then you believe he 's lost?" said Miss Keene, with glistening eyes.

"There ain't a doubt of it," returned Winslow shortly.

"I don't agree with you," said a gentle voice.

They turned quickly towards the benevolent face of Señor Perkins, who had just joined them.

"I differ from my young friend," continued the señor courteously, "because the accident must have happened at about daybreak, when we were close inshore. It would not be impossible for a good swimmer to reach the land, or even," continued Señor Perkins, in answer to the ray of hope that gleamed in Miss Keene's soft eyes, "for him to have been picked up by some passing vessel. The smoke of a large steamer was sighted between us and the land at about that time."

"A steamer!" ejaculated Banks eagerly; "that was one of the new line with the mails. How provoking!"

He was thinking of his lost letters. Miss Keene turned, heartsick, away. Worse than the ghastly interruption to their easy idyllic life was this grim revelation of selfishness. She began to doubt if even the hysterical excitement of her sister passengers was not merely a pleasant titillation of their bored and inactive nerves.

"I believe the señor is right, Miss Keene," said Brace, taking her aside, "and I'll tell you why." He stopped, looked around him, and went on in a lower voice. "There are some circumstances about the affair which look more like deliberation than an accident. He has left nothing behind him of any value or that gives any clue. If it was a suicide he would have left some letter behind for somebody — people always do, you know, at such times — and he would have chosen the open sea. It seems more probable that he threw himself overboard with the intention of reaching the shore."

"But why should he want to leave the ship?" echoed the young girl simply.

"Perhaps he found out that we were *not* going to Mazatlan, and this was his only chance; it must have happened just as the ship went about and stood off from shore again."

"But I don't understand," continued Miss Keene, with

a pretty knitting of her brows, "why he should be so dreadfully anxious to get ashore now."

The young fellow looked at her with the superior smile of youthful sagacity.

"Suppose he had particular reasons for not going to San Francisco, where our laws could reach him! Suppose he had committed some offense! Suppose he was afraid of being questioned or recognized!"

The young girl rose indignantly.

"This is really too shameful! Who dare talk like that?"

Brace colored quickly.

"Who? Why, everybody," he stammered, for a moment abandoning his attitude of individual acumen; "it's the talk of the ship."

"Is it? And before they know whether he's alive or dead — perhaps even while he is still struggling with death — all they can do is to take his character away!" she repeated, with flashing eyes.

"And I'm even worse than they are," he returned, his temper rising with his color. "I ought to have known I was talking to one of *his* friends, instead of one whom I thought was *mine*. I beg your pardon."

He turned away as Miss Keene, apparently not heeding his pique, crossed the deck, and entered into conversation with Mrs. Markham.

It is to be feared that she found little consolation among the other passengers, or even those of her own sex, whom this profound event had united in a certain freemasonry of sympathy and interest — to the exclusion of their former cliques. She soon learned, as the return of the boats to the ship and the ship to her course might have clearly told her, that there was no chance of recovering the missing passenger. She learned that the theory advanced by Brace was the one generally held by them; but with an added romance of

detail, that excited at once their commiseration and admiration. Mrs. Brimmer remembered to have heard him, the second or third night out from Callao, groaning in his state-room; but having mistakenly referred the emotion to ordinary seasickness, she had no doubt lost an opportunity for confidential disclosure. "I am sure," she added, "that had somebody as resolute and practical as you, dear Mrs. Markham, approached him the next day, he would have revealed his sorrow." Miss Chubb was quite certain that she had seen him one night, in tears, by the quarter-railing. "I saw his eyes glistening under his slouched hat as I passed. I remember thinking, at the time, that he ought n't to have been left alone with such a dreadful temptation before him to slip overboard and end his sorrow or his crime." Mrs. Markham also remembered that it was about five o'clock — or was it six? — that morning when she distinctly thought she had heard a splash, and she was almost impelled to get up and look out of the bull's-eye. She should never forgive herself for resisting that impulse, for she was positive now that she would have seen his ghastly face in the water. Some indignation was felt that the captain, after a cursory survey of his state-room, had ordered it to be locked until his fate was more positively known, and the usual seals placed on his effects for their delivery to the authorities at San Francisco. It was believed that some clue to his secret would be found among his personal chattels, if only in the form of a keepsake, a locket, or a bit of jewelry. Miss Chubb had noticed that he wore a seal ring, but not on the engagement finger. In some vague feminine way it was admitted without discussion that one of their own sex was mixed up in the affair, and, with the exception of Miss Keene, general credence was given to the theory that Mazatlan contained his loadstar — the fatal partner and accomplice of his crime, the siren that allured him to his watery grave. I regret to say that the facts gathered by the gen-

tlemen were equally ineffective. The steward who had attended the missing man was obliged to confess that their most protracted and confidential conversation had been on the comparative efficiency of ship biscuits and soda crackers. Mr. Banks, who was known to have spoken to him, could only remember that one warm evening, in reply to a casual remark about the weather, the missing man, burying his ears farther in the turned-up collar of his pea-jacket, had stated, "'It was cold enough to freeze the ears off a brass monkey,' — a remark, no doubt, sir, intended to convey a reason for his hiding his own." Only Señor Perkins retained his serene optimism unimpaired.

"Take my word for it, we shall yet hear good news of our missing friend. Let us at least believe it until we know otherwise. Ah! my dear Mrs. Markham, why should the Unknown always fill us with apprehension? Its surprises are equally often agreeable."

"But we have all been so happy before this; and this seems such an unnecessary and cruel awakening," said Miss Keene, lifting her sad eyes to the speaker, "that I can't help thinking it 's the beginning of the end. Good heavens! what 's that?"

She had started at the dark figure of one of the foreign-looking sailors, who seemed to have suddenly risen out of the deck beside them.

"The Señor Perkins," he said, with an apologetic gesture of his hand to his hatless head.

"You want *me*, my good man?" asked Señor Perkins paternally.

"Si, señor; the mate wishes to see the patrono," he said in Spanish.

"I will come presently."

The sailor hesitated. Señor Perkins took a step nearer to him benignantly. The man raised his eyes to Señor Perkins, and said, —

"Vigilancia."

"Bueno!" returned the señor gently. "Excuse me, ladies, for a moment."

"Perhaps it is some news of poor Mr. Hurlstone?" said Miss Keene, with an instinctive girlish movement of hope.

"Who knows?" returned Señor Perkins, waving his hand as he gayly tripped after his guide. "Let us believe in the best, dear young lady, the best!"

CHAPTER III

"VIGILANCIA"

WITHOUT exchanging another word with his escort, Señor Perkins followed him to the main hatch, where they descended and groped their way through the half obscurity of the lower deck. Here they passed one or two shadows, that, recognizing the señor, seemed to draw aside in a half-awed, half-suppressed shyness, as of caged animals in the presence of their trainer. At the fore hatch they again descended, passing a figure that appeared to be keeping watch at the foot of the ladder, and almost instantly came upon a group lit up by the glare of a bull's-eye lantern. It was composed of the first and second mate, a vicious-looking Peruvian sailor with a bandaged head, and, to the señor's astonishment, the missing passenger Hurlstone, seated on the deck, heavily ironed.

"Tell him what you know, Pedro," said the first mate to the Peruvian sailor curtly.

"It was just daybreak, patrono, before we put about," began the man in Spanish, "that I thought I saw some one gliding along towards the fore hatch; but I lost sight of him. After we had tumbled up to go on the other tack, I heard a noise in the fore hold. I went down and found *him*," pointing to Hurlstone, "hiding there. He had some provisions stowed away beside him, and that package. I grabbed him, patrono. He broke away and struck me here" — he pointed to his still wet bandage — "and would have got out overboard through the port, but the second mate heard the row and came down just in time to stop him."

"When was this?" asked Señor Perkins.

"Guardia di Diana."

"You were chattering, you fellows."

"Quien sabe?" said the Peruvian, lifting his shoulders.

"How does he explain himself?"

"He refuses to speak."

"Take off his irons," said Señor Perkins, in English.

"But" — expostulated the first mate, with a warning gesture.

"I said — take off his irons," repeated Señor Perkins in a dry and unfamiliar voice.

The two mates released the shackles. The prisoner raised his eyes to Señor Perkins. He was a slightly built man of about thirty, fair-haired and hollow-cheeked. His short upper lip was lifted over his teeth, as if from hurried or labored breathing; but his features were regular and determined, and his large blue eyes shone with a strange abstraction of courage and fatuity.

"That will do," continued the señor, in the same tone. "Now leave him with me."

The two mates looked at each other, and hesitated, but, at a glance from Perkins, turned, and ascended the ladder again. The Peruvian alone remained.

"Go!" said the señor sharply.

The man cast a vindictive look at the prisoner and retreated sullenly.

"Did *he* tell you," said the prisoner, looking after the sailor grimly, "that I tried to bribe him to let me go, but that I could n't reach his figure? He wanted too much. He thought I had some stolen money or valuables here," he added, with a bitter laugh, pointing to the package that lay beside him.

"And you had n't?" said Perkins shortly.

"No."

"I believe you. And now, my young friend," said

Perkins, with a singular return of his beaming gentleness, "since those two efficient and competent officers and this energetic but discourteous seaman are gone, would you mind telling me *what* you were hiding for?"

The prisoner raised his eyes on his questioner. For the last three weeks he had lived in the small community of which the señor was a prominent member, but he scarcely recognized him now.

"What if I refuse?" he said.

The señor shrugged his shoulders.

"Those two excellent men would feel it their duty to bring the Peruvian to the captain, and I should be called to interpret to him."

"And I should throw myself overboard the first chance I got. I would have done so ten minutes ago, but the mate stopped me."

His eye glistened with the same fatuous determination he had shown at first. There was no doubt he would do as he said.

"I believe you would," said the señor benevolently; "but I see no present necessity for that, nor for any trouble whatever, if you will kindly tell me *what* I am to say."

The young man's eyes fell.

"I *did* try to conceal myself in the hold," he said bluntly. "I intended to remain there hidden while the ship was at Mazatlan. I did not know until now that the vessel had changed her course."

"And how did you believe your absence would be accounted for?" asked the señor blandly.

"I thought it would be supposed that I had fallen overboard before we entered Mazatlan."

"So that anybody seeking you there would not find you, and you would be believed to be dead?"

"Yes." He raised his eyes quickly to Señor Perkins

again. "I am neither a thief nor a murderer," he said almost savagely, "but I do not choose to be recognized by any one who knows me on this side of the grave."

Señor Perkins's eyes sought his, and for an instant seemed to burn through the singular, fatuous mist that veiled them.

"My friend," he said cheerfully, after a moment's pause, "you have just had a providential escape. I repeat it — a most providential escape. Indeed, if I were inclined to prophesy, I would say you were a man reserved for some special good fortune."

The prisoner stared at him with angry amazement.

"You are a confirmed somnambulist. Excuse me," continued the señor, with a soft, deprecating gesture; "you are, of course, unaware of it — most victims of that singular complaint are, or at least fail to recognize the extent of their aberration. In your case it has only been indicated by a profound melancholy and natural shunning of society. In a paroxysm of your disorder, you rise in the night, fully dress yourself, and glide as unconsciously along the deck in pursuance of some vague fancy. You pass the honest but energetic sailor who has just left us, who thinks you are a phantom, and fails to give the alarm; you are precipitated by a lurch of the ship through an open hatchway; the shock renders you insensible until you are discovered and restored."

"And who will believe this pretty story?" said the young man scornfully.

"The honest sailor who picked you up, who has related it in his own picturesque tongue to *me*, who will in turn interpret it to the captain and the other passengers," replied Señor Perkins blandly.

"And what of the two mates who were here?" said the prisoner hesitatingly.

"They are two competent officers, who are quite content

to carry out the orders of their superiors, and who understand their duty too well to interfere with the reports of their subordinates, on which these orders are based. Mr. Brooks, the first officer, though fairly intelligent and a good reader of history, is only imperfectly acquainted with the languages, and Mr. M'Carthy's knowledge of Spanish is confined to a few objurgations which generally preclude extended conversation."

"And who are you," said Hurlstone more calmly, "who are willing to do this for a stranger?"

"A friend — equally of yours, the captain's, and the other passengers," replied Señor Perkins pleasantly. "A man who believes you, my dear sir, and, even if he did not, sees no reason to interrupt the harmony that has obtained in our little community during our delightful passage. Were any scandal to occur, were you to carry out your idea of throwing yourself overboard, it would, to say nothing of my personal regret, produce a discord for which there is no necessity, and from which no personal good can be derived. Here at least your secret is secure, for even *I* do not ask what it is; we meet here on an equality, based on our own conduct and courtesy to each other, limited by no antecedent prejudice, and restrained by no thought of the future. In a little while we shall be separated — why should it not be as friends? Why should we not look back upon our little world of this ship as a happy one?"

Hurlstone gazed at the speaker with a troubled air. It was once more the quaint, benevolent figure whom he had vaguely noted among the other passengers, and as vaguely despised. He hesitated a moment, and then, half timidly, half reservedly, extended his hand.

"I thank you," he said, "at least for not asking my secret. Perhaps, if it was only" —

"Your own — you might tell it," interrupted the señor gayly. "I understand. I see you recognize my principle.

There is no necessity of your putting yourself to that pain, or another to that risk. And now, my young friend, time presses. I must say a word to our friends above, who are waiting, and I shall see that you are taken privately to your state-room while most of the other passengers are still on deck. If you would permit yourself the weakness of allowing the steward to carry or assist you it would be better. Let me advise you that the excitement of the last three hours has not left you in your full strength. You must really give *me* the pleasure of spreading the glad tidings of your safety among the passengers, who have been so terribly alarmed."

"They will undoubtedly be relieved," said Hurlstone, with ironical bitterness.

"You wrong them," returned the señor, with gentle reproach; "especially the ladies."

The voice of the first mate from above here checked his further speech, and perhaps prevented him, as he quickly reascended the upper deck, from noticing the slight embarrassment of his prisoner.

The señor's explanations to the mate were evidently explicit and brief. In a few moments he reappeared with the steward and his assistant.

"Lean on these men," he said to Hurlstone significantly, "and do not overestimate your strength. Thank Heaven, no bones are broken, and you are only bruised by the fall. With a little rest, I think we can get along without laying the captain's medicine-chest under contribution. Our kind friend Mr. Brooks has had the lower deck cleared, so that you may gain your state-room without alarming the passengers or fatiguing yourself."

He pressed Hurlstone's hand as the latter resigned himself to the steward, and was half led, half supported, through the gloom of the lower deck. Señor Perkins remained for an instant gazing after him with even more than

his usual benevolence. Suddenly his arm was touched almost rudely. He turned, and encountered the lowering eyes of the Peruvian sailor.

"And what is to be done for me?" said the man roughly, in Spanish.

"You?"

"Yes. Who's to pay for this?" he pointed to his bandaged head.

Without changing his bland expression, Señor Perkins apparently allowed his soft black eyes to rest, as if fondly, on the angry pupils of the Peruvian. The eyes of the latter presently sought the ground.

"My dear Yoto," said Señor Perkins softly, "I scarcely think that this question of personal damage can be referred to the State. I will, however, look into it. Meantime, let me advise you to control your enthusiasm. Too much zeal in a subordinate is even more fatal than laxity. For the rest, son, be vigilant — and peaceful. Thou hast meant well; much shall be — forgiven thee. For the present, vamos!"

He turned on his heel, and ascended to the upper deck. Here he found the passengers thrilling with a vague excitement. A few brief orders, a few briefer explanations, dropped by the officers, had already whetted curiosity to the keenest point. The señor was instantly beset with interrogations. Gentle, compassionate, with well-rounded periods, he related the singular accident that had befallen Mr. Hurlstone, and his providential escape from almost certain death. "At the most, he has now only the exhaustion of the shock, from which a day of perfect rest will recover him; but," he added deprecatingly, "at present he ought not to be disturbed or excited."

The story was received by those fellow passengers who had been strongest in their suspicions of Hurlstone's suicide or flight with a keen sense of discomfiture, only mitigated

by a humorous perception of the cause of the accident. It was agreed that a man whose ludicrous infirmity had been the cause of putting the ship out of her course, and the passengers out of their comfortable security, could not be wronged by attributing to him manlier and more criminal motives. A somnambulist on shipboard was clearly a humorous object, who might, however, become a bore. "It all accounts for his being so deuced quiet and reserved in the daytime," said Crosby facetiously; "he could n't keep it up the whole twenty-four hours. If he 'd only given us a little more of his company when he was awake, he would n't have gallivanted round at night, and we 'd have been thirty miles nearer port." Equal amusement was created by the humorous suggestion that the unfortunate man had never been entirely awake during the voyage, and that he would now, probably for the first time, really make the acquaintance of his fellow voyagers. Listening to this badinage with bland tolerance, Señor Perkins no doubt felt that, for the maintenance of that perfect amity he so ardently apostrophized, it was just as well that Hurlstone was in his state-room, and out of hearing.

He would have been more satisfied, however, had he been permitted to hear the feminine comments on this incident. In the eyes of the lady passengers Mr. Hurlstone was more a hero than ever; his mysterious malady invested him with a vague and spiritual interest; his escape from the awful fate reserved to him, in their excited fancy, gave him the éclat of having *actually* survived it; while the supposed real incident of his fall through the hatchway lent him the additional lustre of a wounded and crippled man. That prostrate condition of active humanity, which so irresistibly appeals to the feminine imagination as segregating their victim from the distractions of his own sex, and, as it were, delivering him helpless into their hands, was at once their opportunity and his. All the

ladies volunteered to nurse him; it was with difficulty that Mrs. Brimmer and Mrs. Markham, reinforced with bandages, flannels, and liniments, and supported by different theories, could be kept from the door of his state-room. Jellies, potted meats, and delicacies from their private stores appeared on trays at his bedside, to be courteously declined by the Señor Perkins, in his new functions of a benevolent type of Sancho Panza physician. To say that this pleased the gentle optimism of the señor is unnecessary. Even while his companion writhed under the sting of this enforced compassion, the good man beamed philosophically upon him.

"Take care, or I shall end this cursed farce in my own way," said Hurlstone ominously, his eyes again filming with a vague desperation.

"My dear boy," returned the señor gently, "reflect upon the situation. Your suffering, real or implied, produces in the hearts of these gentle creatures a sympathy which not only exalts and sustains their higher natures, but, I conscientiously believe, gratifies and pleases their lower ones. Why should you deny them this opportunity of indulging their twofold organisms, and beguiling the tedium of the voyage, merely because of some erroneous exhibition of fact?"

Later, Señor Perkins might have added to this exposition the singularly stimulating effect which Hurlstone's supposed peculiarity had upon the feminine imagination. But there were some secrets which were not imparted even to him, and it was only to each other that the ladies confided certain details and reminiscences. For it now appeared that they had all heard strange noises and stealthy steps at night; and Mrs. Brimmer was quite sure that on one occasion the handle of her state-room door was softly turned. Mrs. Markham also remembered distinctly that only a week before, being unable to sleep, she had ven-

tured out into the saloon in a dressing-gown to get her diary, which she had left with a portfolio on a chair; that she had a sudden consciousness of another presence in the saloon, although she could distinguish nothing by the dim light of the swinging lantern; and that, after quickly returning to her room, she was quite positive she heard a door close. But the most surprising reminiscence developed by the late incident was from Mrs. Brimmer's nurse, Susan. As it, apparently, demonstrated the fact that Mr. Hurlstone not only walked but *talked* in his sleep, it possessed a more mysterious significance. It seemed that Susan was awakened one night by the sound of voices, and, opening her door softly, saw a figure which she at first supposed to be the Señor Perkins, but which she now was satisfied was poor Mr. Hurlstone. As there was no one else to be seen, the voices must have proceeded from that single figure; and, being in a strange and unknown tongue, were inexpressibly weird and awful. When pressed to remember what was said, she could only distinguish one word — a woman's name — Virgil — Vigil — no: Virginescia!

"It must have been one of those creatures at Callao, whose pictures you can buy for ten cents," said Mrs. Brimmer.

"If it is one of them, Susan must have made a mistake in the first two syllables of the name," said Mrs. Markham grimly.

"But surely, Miss Keene," said Miss Chubb, turning to that young lady, who had taken only the part of a passive listener to this colloquy, and was gazing over the railing at the sinking sun, "surely *you* can tell us something about this poor young man. If I don't mistake, you are the only person he ever honored with his conversation."

"And only once, I think," said the young girl, slightly coloring. "He happened to be sitting next to me on deck, and I believe he spoke only out of politeness. At least, he seemed very quiet and reserved, and talked on

general topics, and I thought very intelligently. I — should have thought — I mean," she continued hesitatingly — "I thought he was an educated gentleman."

"That is n't at all inconsistent with photographs or sleep-walking," said Mrs. Brimmer, with one of her vague simplicities. "Uncle Quincey brought home a whole sheaf of those women whom he said he 'd met; and one of my cousins, who was educated at Heidelberg, used to walk in his sleep, as it were, all over Europe."

"Did you notice anything queer in his eyes, Miss Keene?" asked Miss Chubb vivaciously.

Miss Keene had noticed that his eyes were his best feature, albeit somewhat abstracted and melancholy; but for some vague reason she could not explain herself, she answered hurriedly that she had seen nothing very particular in them.

"Well," said Mrs. Markham positively, "when he 's able to be out again, *I* shall consider it my duty to look him up, and try to keep him sufficiently awake in the daytime to insure his resting better at night."

"No one can do it, dear Mrs. Markham, better than you; and no one would think of misunderstanding your motives," said Mrs. Brimmer sweetly. "But it 's getting late, and the air seems to be ever so much colder. Captain Bunker says it 's because we are really nearing the Californian coast. It seems so odd! Mr. Brimmer wrote to me that it was so hot in Sacramento that you could do something with eggs in the sun — I forget what."

"Hatch them?" suggested Miss Chubb.

"I think so," returned Mrs. Brimmer, rising. "Let us go below."

The three ladies rustled away; but Miss Keene, throwing a wrap around her shoulders, lingered by the railing. With one little hand supporting her round chin, she leaned over the darkly heaving water. She was thinking of her brief

and only interview with that lonely man whose name was now in everybody's mouth, but who, until to-day, had been passed over by them with an unconcern equal to his own. And yet to her refined and delicately feminine taste there appeared no reason why he should not have mingled with his fellows, and have accepted the homage from them that *she* was instinctively ready to give. He seemed to her like a gentleman — and something more. In her limited but joyous knowledge of the world — a knowledge gathered in the happy school-life of an orphan who but faintly remembered and never missed a parent's care — she knew nothing of the mysterious dominance of passion, suffering, or experience in fashioning the outward expression of men, and saw only that Mr. Hurlstone was unlike any other. That unlikeness was fascinating. He had said very little to her in that very brief period. He had not talked to her with the general gallantry which she already knew her prettiness elicited. Without knowing why, she felt there was a subtle flattery in his tacit recognition of that other self of which she, as yet, knew so little. She could not remember what they had talked about — nor why. Nor was she offended that he had never spoken to her since, nor gone beyond a grave lifting of his hat to her when he passed.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE FOG

By noon of the following day the coast of the Peninsula of California had been sighted to leeward. The lower temperature of the northwest Trades had driven Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb into their state-rooms to consult their wardrobes in view of an impending change from the light muslins and easy languid toilets of the Tropics. That momentous question for the moment held all other topics in abeyance; and even Mrs. Markham and Miss Keene, though they still kept the deck, in shawls and wraps, sighed over this feminine evidence of the gentle passing of their summer holiday. The gentlemen had already mounted their pea-jackets and overcoats, with the single exception of Señor Perkins, who, in chivalrous compliment to the elements, still bared his unfettered throat and forehead to the breeze. The aspect of the coast, as seen from the Excelsior's deck, seemed to bear out Mr. Banks's sweeping indictment of the day before. A few low, dome-like hills, yellow and treeless as sand dunes, scarcely raised themselves above the horizon. The air, too, appeared to have taken upon itself a dry asperity; the sun shone with a hard, practical brilliancy. Miss Keene raised her eyes to Señor Perkins, with a pretty impatience that she sometimes indulged in, as one of the privileges of accepted beauty and petted youth.

"I don't think much of your peninsula," she said pertingly. "It looks dreadfully flat and uninteresting. It was a great deal nicer on the other coast, or even at sea."

"Perhaps you are judging hastily, my dear young friend," said Señor Perkins, with habitual tolerance. "I have heard that behind those hills, and hidden from sight in some of the cañons, are perfect little Edens of beauty and fruitfulness. They are like some ardent natures that cover their approaches with the ashes of their burnt-up fires, but only do it the better to keep intact their glowing, vivifying, central heat."

"How very poetical, Mr. Perkins!" said Mrs. Markham, with blunt admiration. "You ought to put that into verse."

"I have," returned Señor Perkins modestly. "They are some reflections on — I hardly dare call them an apostrophe to — the crater of Colima. If you will permit me to read them to you this evening, I shall be charmed. I hope also to take that opportunity of showing you the verses of a gifted woman, not yet known to fame, Mrs. Euphemia M'Corkle, of Peoria, Illinois."

Mrs. Markham coughed slightly. The gifted M'Corkle was already known to her through certain lines quoted by the señor; and the entire cabin had one evening fled before a larger and more ambitious manuscript of the fair Illinoisian. Miss Keene, who dreaded the reappearance of this poetical phantom that seemed to haunt the señor's fancy, could not, however, forget that she had been touched on that occasion by a kindly moisture of eye and tremulousness of voice in the reader; and in spite of the hopeless pathos of the composition, she had forgiven him. Though she did not always understand Señor Perkins, she liked him too well to allow him to become ridiculous to others; and at the present moment she promptly interposed with a charming assumption of coquetry.

"You forget that you promised to let *me* read the manuscript first, and in private, and that you engaged to give me my revenge at chess this evening. But do as you like.

You are all fast becoming faithless. I suppose it is because our holiday is drawing to a close, and we shall soon forget we ever had any, or be ashamed we ever played so long. Everybody seems to be getting nervous and fidgety and preparing for civilization again. Mr. Banks, for the last few days, has dressed himself regularly as if he were going down town to his office, and writes letters in the corner of the saloon as if it were a counting-house. Mr. Crosby and Mr. Winslow do nothing but talk of their prospects, and I believe they are drawing up articles of partnership together. Here is Mr. Brace frightening me by telling me that my brother will lock me up, to keep the rich miners from laying their bags of gold dust at my feet; and Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb assure me that I have n't a decent gown to go ashore in."

"You forget Mr. Hurlstone," said Brace, with ill-concealed bitterness; "he seems to have time enough on his hands, and I dare say would sympathize with you. You women like idle men."

"If we do, it 's because only the idle men have the time to amuse us," retorted Miss Keene. "But," she added, with a laugh, "I suppose I 'm getting nervous and fidgety myself; for I find myself every now and then watching the officers and men, and listening to the orders as if something were going to happen again. I never felt so before; I never used to have the least concern in what you call 'the working of the ship,' and now" — her voice, which had been half playful, half pettish, suddenly became grave, — "and now — look at the mate and those men forward. There certainly is something going on, or is going to happen. What *are* they looking at?"

The mate had clambered halfway up the main ratlines, and was looking earnestly to windward. Two or three of the crew on the forecastle were gazing in the same direction. The group of cabin passengers on the quarter-deck, following

their eyes, saw what appeared to be another low shore on the opposite bow.

"Why, there's another coast there!" said Mrs. Markham.

"It's a fog-bank," said Señor Perkins gravely. He quickly crossed the deck, exchanged a few words with the officer, and returned. Miss Keene, who had felt a sense of relief, nevertheless questioned his face as he again stood beside her. But he had recovered his beaming cheerfulness. "It's nothing to alarm you," he said, answering her glance, "but it may mean delay if we can't get out of it. You don't mind that, I know."

"No," replied the young girl, smiling. "Besides, it would be a new experience. We've had winds and calms — we only want fog now to complete our adventures. Unless it's going to make everybody cross," she continued, with a mischievous glance at Brace.

"You'll find it won't improve the temper of the officers," said Crosby, who had joined the group. "There's nothing sailors hate more than a fog. They can go to sleep in a hurricane between the rolls of a ship, but a fog keeps them awake. It's the one thing they can't shirk. There's the skipper tumbled up, too! The old man looks wrathy, don't he? But it's no use now; we're going slap into it, and the wind's failing!"

It was true. In the last few moments all that vast glistening surface of metallic blue which stretched so far to windward appeared to be slowly eaten away as if by some dull, corroding acid; the distant horizon line of sea and sky was still distinct and sharply cut, but the whole water between them had grown gray, as if some invisible shadow had passed in mid-air across it. The actual fog-bank had suddenly lost its resemblance to the shore, had lifted as a curtain, and now seemed suspended over the ship. Gradually it descended; the top-gallant and top-sails were lost in this mysterious vapor, yet the horizon

line still glimmered faintly. Then another mist seemed to rise from the sea and meet it; in another instant the deck whereon they stood shrank to the appearance of a raft adrift in a faint gray sea. With the complete obliteration of all circumambient space, the wind fell. Their isolation was complete.

It was notable that the first and most peculiar effect of this misty environment was the absolute silence. The empty, invisible sails above did not flap; the sheets and halyards hung limp; even the faint creaking of an unseen block overhead was so startling as to draw every eye upwards. Muffled orders from viewless figures forward were obeyed by phantoms that moved noiselessly through the gray sea that seemed to have invaded the deck. Even the passengers spoke in whispers, or held their breath, in passive groups, as if fearing to break a silence so replete with awe and anticipation. It was next noticed that the vessel was subjected to some vague motion; the resistance of the water had ceased, the waves no longer hissed under her bows, or nestled and lapped under her counter; a dreamy, irregular, and listless rocking had taken the place of the regular undulations; at times, a faint and half delicious vertigo seemed to overcome their senses; the ship was drifting.

Captain Bunker stood near the bitts, where his brief orders were transmitted to the man at the almost useless wheel. At his side Señor Perkins beamed with unshaken serenity, and hopefully replied to the captain's half surly, half anxious queries.

"By the chart we should be well east of Los Lobos island, d' ye see?" he said impatiently. "You don't happen to remember the direction of the current off shore when you were running up here?"

"It 's five years ago," said the señor modestly; "but I remember we kept well to the west to weather Cape St.

Eugenio. My impression is that there was a strong north-westerly current setting north of Ballenos Bay."

"And we 're in it now," said Captain Bunker shortly. "How near St. Roque does it set ? "

"Within a mile or two. I should keep away more to the west," said Señor Perkins, "and clear" —

"I ain't asking you to run the ship," interrupted Captain Bunker sharply. "How 's her head now, Mr. Brooks ? "

The seamen standing near cast a rapid glance at Señor Perkins, but not a muscle of his bland face moved or betrayed a consciousness of the insult. Whatever might have been the feeling towards him, at that moment the sailors — after their fashion — admired their captain; strong, masterful, and imperious. The danger that had cleared his eye, throat, and brain, and left him once more the daring and skillful navigator they knew, wiped out of their shallow minds the vicious habit that had sunk him below their level.

It had now become perceptible to even the inexperienced eyes of the passengers that the Excelsior was obeying some new and profound impulse. The vague drifting had ceased, and in its place had come a mysterious but regular movement, in which the surrounding mist seemed to participate, until fog and vessel moved together towards some unseen but well-defined bourne. In vain had the boats of the Excelsior, manned by her crew, endeavored with a towing-line to check or direct the inexplicable movement; in vain had Captain Bunker struggled, with all the skilled weapons of seamanship, against his invincible foe; wrapped in the impenetrable fog, the ship moved ghost-like to what seemed to be her doom.

The anxiety of the officers had not as yet communicated itself to the passengers; those who had been most nervous in the ordinary onset of wind and wave looked upon the fog as a phenomenon whose only disturbance might be

delay. To Miss Keene this conveyed no annoyance; rather that placid envelopment of cloud soothed her fancy; she submitted herself to its soft embraces, and to the mysterious onward movement of the ship, as if it were part of a youthful dream. Once she thought of the ship of Sindbad, and that fatal loadstone mountain, with an awe that was, however, half a pleasure.

"You are not frightened, Miss Keene?" said a voice near her.

She started slightly. It was the voice of Mr. Hurlstone. So thick was the fog that his face and figure appeared to come dimly out of it, like a part of her dreaming fancy. Without replying to his question, she said quickly, —

"You are better, then, Mr. Hurlstone? We — we were all so frightened for you."

An angry shadow crossed his thin face, and he hesitated. After a pause he recovered himself, and said, —

"I was saying you were taking all this very quietly. I don't think there 's much danger myself. And if we should go ashore here" —

"Well?" suggested Miss Keene, ignoring this first intimation of danger in her surprise at the man's manner.

"Well, we should all be separated only a few days earlier, that 's all!"

More frightened at the strange bitterness of his voice than by the sense of physical peril, she was vaguely moving away towards the dimly outlined figures of her companions when she was arrested by a voice forward. There was a slight murmur among the passengers.

"What did he say?" asked Miss Keene. "What are 'Breakers ahead'?"

Hurlstone did not reply.

"Where away?" asked a second voice.

The murmur still continuing, Captain Bunker's hoarse voice pierced the gloom, — "Silence fore and aft!"

The first voice repeated faintly, —

"On the larboard bow."

There was another silence. Again the voice repeated, as if mechanically, —

"Breakers!"

"Where away?"

"On the starboard beam."

"We are in some passage or channel," said Hurlstone quietly.

The young girl glanced round her and saw for the first time that, in one of those inexplicable movements she had not understood, the other passengers had been withdrawn into a limited space of the deck, as if through some authoritative orders, while she and her companion had been evidently overlooked. A couple of sailors, who had suddenly taken their positions by the quarter-boats, strengthened the accidental separation.

"Is there some one taking care of you?" he asked, half hesitatingly; "Mr. Brace — Perkins — or" —

"No," she replied quickly. "Why?"

"Well, we are very near the boat in an emergency, and you might allow me to stay here and see you safe in it."

"But the other ladies? Mrs. Markham, and" —

"They 'll take their turn after *you*," he said grimly, picking up a wrap from the railing and throwing it over her shoulders.

"But — I don't understand!" she stammered, more embarrassed by the situation than by any impending peril.

"There is very little danger, I think," he added impatiently. "There is scarcely any sea; the ship has very little way on; and these breakers are not over rocks. Listen."

She tried to listen. At first she heard nothing but the occasional low voice of command near the wheel. Then she became conscious of a gentle, soothing murmur through

the fog to the right. She had heard such a murmuring accompaniment to her girlish dreams at Newport on a still summer night. There was nothing to frighten her, but it increased her embarrassment.

"And you?" she said awkwardly, raising her soft eyes.

"Oh, if you are all going off in the boats, by Jove, I think I'll stick to the ship!" he returned, with a frankness that would have been rude but for its utter abstraction.

Miss Keene was silent. The ship moved gently onward. The monotonous cry of the leadsman in the chains was the only sound audible. The soundings were indicating shoaler water, although the murmuring of the surf had been left far astern. The almost imperceptible darkening of the mist on either beam seemed to show that the Excelsior was entering some land-locked passage. The movement of the vessel slackened, the tide was beginning to ebb. Suddenly a wave of far-off clamor, faint but sonorous, broke across the ship. There was an interval of breathless silence, and then it broke again, and more distinctly. It was the sound of bells!

The thrill of awe which passed through passengers and crew at this spiritual challenge from the vast and intangible void around them had scarcely subsided when the captain turned to Señor Perkins with a look of surly interrogation. The señor brushed his hat further back on his head, wiped his brow, and became thoughtful.

"It's too far south for Rosario," he said deprecatingly; "and the only other mission I know of is San Carlos, and that's far inland. But that is the Angelus, and those are mission bells, surely."

The captain turned to Mr. Brooks. The voice of invisible command again passed along the deck, and, with a splash in the water and the rattling of chains, the Excelsior swung slowly round on her anchor on the bosom of what seemed a placid bay.

Miss Keene, who, in her complete absorption, had listened to the phantom bells with an almost superstitious exaltation, had forgotten the presence of her companion, and now turned towards him. But he was gone. The imminent danger he had spoken of, half slightingly, he evidently considered as past. He had taken the opportunity offered by the slight bustle made by the lowering of the quarter-boat and the departure of the mate on a voyage of discovery to mingle with the crowd, and regain his stateroom. With the anchoring of the vessel, the momentary restraint was relaxed, the passengers were allowed to pervade the deck, and Mrs. Markham and Mr. Brace simultaneously rushed to Miss Keene's side.

"We were awfully alarmed for you, my dear," said Mrs. Markham, "until we saw you had a protector. Do tell me — what *did* he say? He must have thought the danger great to have broken the señor's orders and come upon deck? What did he talk about?"

With a vivid recollection in her mind of Mr. Hurlstone's contemptuous ignoring of the other ladies, Miss Keene became slightly embarrassed. Her confusion was not removed by the consciousness that the jealous eyes of Brace were fixed upon her.

"Perhaps he thought it was night, and walked upon deck in his sleep," remarked Brace sarcastically. "He 's probably gone back to bed."

"He offered me his protection very politely, and begged to remain to put me in the boat in case of danger," said Miss Keene, recovering herself, and directing her reply to Mrs. Markham. "I think that others have made me the same kind of offer — who were wide awake," she added mischievously to Brace.

"I would n't be too sure that they were not foolishly dreaming too," returned Brace, in a lower voice.

"I should think we all were asleep or dreaming here,"

said Mrs. Markham briskly. "Nobody seems to know where we are, and the only man who might guess it — Señor Perkins — has gone off in the boat with the mate."

"We 're not a mile from shore and a Catholic church," said Crosby, who had joined them. "I just left Mrs. Brimmer, who is very High Church, you know, quite overcome by these Angelus bells. She 's been entreating the captain to let her go ashore for vespers. It would n't be a bad idea, if we could only see what sort of a place we 've got to. It would n't do to go feeling round the settlement in the dark — would it? Hallo! what 's that? Oh, by Jove, that 'll finish Mrs. Brimmer, sure!"

"Hush!" said Miss Keene impulsively.

He stopped. The long-drawn cadence of a chant in thin clear soprano voices swept through the fog from the invisible shore, rose high above the ship, and then fell, dying away with immeasurable sweetness and melancholy. Even when it had passed, a lingering melody seemed to fill the deck. Two or three of the foreign sailors crossed themselves devoutly; the other passengers withheld their speech, and looked at each other. Afraid to break the charm by speech, they listened again, but in vain; an infinite repose followed that seemed to pervade everything.

It was broken, at last, by the sound of oars in their rowlocks; the boat was returning. But it was noticed that the fog had slightly lifted from the surface of the water, for the boat was distinctly visible two cables' length from the ship as she approached, and it was seen that besides the first officer and Señor Perkins there were two strangers in the boat. Everybody rushed to the side for a nearer view of those strange inhabitants of the unknown shore; but the boat's crew suddenly ceased rowing, and lay on their oars until an indistinct hail and reply passed between the boat and ship. There was a bustle forward, an unexpected thunder from the Excelsior's eight-pounder at the bow port;

Captain Bunker and the second mate ranged themselves at the companion-way, and the passengers for the first time became aware that they were participating at the reception of visitors of distinction, as two strange and bizarre figures stepped upon the deck

CHAPTER V

TODOS SANTOS

It was evident that the two strangers represented some exalted military and ecclesiastical authority. This was shown in their dress — a long-forgotten, half-mediæval costume, that to the imaginative spectator was perfectly in keeping with their mysterious advent, and to the more practical as startling as a masquerade. The foremost figure wore a broad-brimmed hat of soft felt, with tarnished gold lace, and a dark feather tucked in its recurved flap; a short cloak of fine black cloth thrown over one shoulder left a buff leathern jacket and breeches, ornamented with large round silver buttons, exposed until they were met by high boots of untanned yellow buckskin that reached halfway up the thigh. A broad baldric of green silk hung from his shoulder across his breast, and supported at his side a long sword with an enormous basket hilt, through which somewhat coquettishly peeped a white lace handkerchief. Tall and erect, in spite of the grizzled hair and iron-gray moustaches and wrinkled face of a man of sixty, he suddenly halted on the deck with a military precision that made the jingling chains and bits of silver on his enormous spurs ring again. He was followed by an ecclesiastic of apparently his own age, but smoothly shaven, clad in a black silk sotana and sash, and wearing the old-fashioned oblong, curl-brimmed hat sacred to "Don Basilo," of the modern opera. Behind him appeared the genial face of Señor Perkins, shining with the benignant courtesy of a master of ceremonies.

"If this is a fair sample of the circus ashore, I 'll take two tickets," whispered Crosby, who had recovered his audacity.

"I have the inexpressible honor," said Señor Perkins to Captain Bunker, with a gracious wave of his hand towards the extraordinary figures, "to present you to the illustrious Don Miguel Briones, Comandante of the Presidio of Todos Santos, at present hidden in the fog, and the very reverend and pious Padre Esteban, of the Mission of Todos Santos, likewise invisible. When I state to you," he continued, with a slight lifting of his voice, so as to include the curious passengers in his explanation, "that, with very few exceptions, this is the usual condition of the atmosphere at the entrance to the Mission and Presidio of Todos Santos, and that the last exception took place thirty-five years ago, when a ship entered the harbor, you will understand why these distinguished gentlemen have been willing to waive the formality of your waiting upon them first, and have taken the initiative. The illustrious comandante has been generous to exempt you from the usual port regulations, and to permit you to wood and to water " —

"What port regulations is he talking of ? " asked Captain Bunker testily.

"The Mexican regulations forbidding any foreign vessel to communicate with the shore," returned Señor Perkins deprecatingly.

"Never heard of 'em. When were they given ? "

The señor turned and addressed a few words to the commander, who stood apart in silent dignity.

"In 1792."

"In what ? — Is he mad ? " said Bunker. "Does he know what year this is ? "

"The illustrious commander believes it to be the year of grace 1854," answered Señor Perkins quietly. "In the case of the only two vessels which have touched here since

1792 the order was not carried out because they were Mexican coasters. The illustrious comandante explains that the order he speaks of as on record distinctly referred to the ship 'Columbia, which belonged to the General Washington.'"

"General Washington!" echoed Bunker, angrily staring at the señor. "What's this stuff? Do you mean to say they don't know any history later than our old Revolutionary War? Have n't they heard of the United States among them? Nor California — that we took from them during the late war?"

"Nor how we licked 'em out of their boots, and that's saying a good deal" whispered Crosby, glancing at the comandante's feet.

Señor Perkins raised a gentle, deprecating hand.

"For fifty years the Presidio and the Mission of Todos Santos have had but this communication with the outer world," he said blandly. "Hidden by impenetrable fogs from the ocean pathway at their door, cut off by burning and sterile deserts from the surrounding country, they have preserved a trust and propagated a faith in enforced but not unhappy seclusion. The wars that have shaken mankind, the dissensions that have even disturbed the serenity of their own nation on the mainland, have never reached them here. Left to themselves, they have created a blameless Arcadia and an ideal community within an extent of twenty square leagues. Why should we disturb their innocent complacency and tranquil enjoyment by information which cannot increase and might impair their present felicity? Why should we dwell upon a late political and international episode which, while it has been a benefit to us, has been a humiliation to them as a nation, and which might not only imperil our position as guests, but interrupt our practical relations to the wood and water, with which the country abounds?"

He paused, and before the captain could speak, turned to the silent commander, addressed him in a dozen phrases of fluent and courteous Spanish, and once more turned to Captain Bunker.

"I have told him you are touched to the heart with his courtesy, which you recognize as coming from the fit representative of the great Mexican nation. He reciprocates your fraternal emotion, and begs you to consider the Presidio, and all that it contains, at your disposition and the disposition of your friends — the passengers, particularly those fair ladies," said Señor Perkins, turning with graceful promptitude towards the group of lady passengers, and slightly elevating himself on the tips of his neat boots, "whose white hands he kisses, and at whose feet he lays the devotion of a Mexican caballero and officer."

He waved his hand towards the comandante, who, stepping forward, swept the deck with his plumed hat before each of the ladies in solemn succession. Recovering himself, he bowed more stiffly to the male passengers, picked his handkerchief out of the hilt of his sword, gracefully wiped his lips, pulled the end of his long gray moustache, and became again rigid.

"The reverend father," continued Señor Perkins, turning towards the priest, "regrets that the rules of his order prevent his extending the same courtesy to these ladies at the Mission. But he hopes to meet them at the Presidio, and they will avail themselves of his aid and counsel there and everywhere."

Father Esteban, following the speaker's words with a gracious and ready smile, at once moved forward among the passengers, offering an antique snuff-box to the gentlemen, or passing before the ladies with slightly uplifted benedictory palms and a caressing paternal gesture. Mrs. Brimmer, having essayed a French sentence, was delighted and half frightened to receive a response from the eccle-

siastic, and speedily monopolized him until he was summoned by the commander to the returning boat.

"A most accomplished man, my dear," said Mrs. Brimmer, as the Excelsior's cannon again thundered after the retiring oars, "like all of his order. He says, although Don Miguel does not speak French, that his secretary does; and we shall have no difficulty in making ourselves understood."

"Then you really intend to go ashore?" said Miss Keene timidly.

"Decidedly," returned Mrs. Brimmer potentially. "It would be most unpolite, not to say insulting, if we did not accept the invitation. You have no idea of the strictness of Spanish etiquette. Besides, he may have heard of Mr. Brimmer."

"As his last information was only up to 1792, he might have forgotten it," said Crosby gravely. "So perhaps it would be safer to go on the general invitation."

"As Mr. Brimmer's ancestors came over on the Mayflower, long before 1792, it does n't seem so very impossible, if it comes to that," said Mrs. Brimmer, with her usual unanswerable naïveté; "provided always that you are not joking, Mr. Crosby. One never knows when you are serious."

"Mrs. Brimmer is quite right; we must all go. This is no mere formality," said Señor Perkins, who had returned to the ladies. "Indeed, I have myself promised the comandante to bring *you*," he turned towards Miss Keene, "if you will permit Mrs. Markham and myself to act as your escort. It was Don Miguel's express request."

A slight flush of pride suffused the cheek of the young girl, but the next moment she turned diffidently towards Mrs. Brimmer.

"We must all go together," she said; "shall we not?"

"You see your triumphs have begun already," said

Brace, with a nervous smile. "You need no longer laugh at me for predicting your fate in San Francisco."

Miss Keene cast a hurried glance around her, in the faint hope — she scarcely knew why — that Mr. Hurlstone had overheard the señor's invitation; nor could she tell why she was disappointed at not seeing him. But he had not appeared on deck during the presence of their strange visitors; nor was he in the boat which half an hour later conveyed her to the shore. He must have either gone in one of the other boats, or fulfilled his strange threat of remaining on the ship.

The boats pulled away together towards the invisible shore, piloted by Captain Bunker, the first officer, and Señor Perkins in the foremost boat. It had grown warmer, and the fog that stole softly over them touched their faces with the tenderness of caressing fingers. Miss Keene, wrapped up in the stern sheets of the boat, gave way to the dreamy influence of this weird procession through the water, retaining only perception enough to be conscious of the singular illusions of the mist that alternately thickened and lightened before their bow. At times it seemed as if they were driving full upon a vast pier or breakwater of cold gray granite, that, opening to let the foremost boat pass, closed again before them; at times it seemed as if they had diverged from their course, and were once more upon the open sea, the horizon a far-off line of vanishing color; at times, faint lights seemed to pierce the gathering darkness, or to move like will-o'-wisps across the smooth surface, when suddenly the keel grated on the sand. A narrow but perfectly well-defined strip of palpable strand appeared before them; they could faintly discern the moving lower limbs of figures whose bodies were still hidden in the mist; then they were lifted from the boats. The first few steps on dry land carried them out of the fog that seemed to rise like a sloping roof from the water's edge,

leaving them under its canopy in the full light of actual torches held by a group of picturesquely dressed people before the vista of a faintly lit, narrow, ascending street. The dim twilight of the closing day lingered under this roof of fog, which seemed to hang scarcely a hundred feet above them, and showed a wall or rampart of brown adobe on their right that extended nearly to the water; to the left, at the distance of a few hundred yards, another low brown wall appeared; above it rose a fringe of foliage, and, more distant and indistinct, two white towers, that were lost in the nebulous gray.

One of the figures dressed in green jackets, who seemed to be in authority, now advanced, and, after a moment's parley with Señor Perkins while the Excelsior's passengers were being collected from the different boats, courteously led the way along the wall of the fortification. Presently a low opening or gateway appeared, followed by the challenge of a green-jacketed sentry, and the sentence, "Dios y Libertad." It was repeated in the interior of a dusky courtyard, surrounded by a low corridor, where a dozen green-jacketed men of aboriginal type and complexion, carrying antique flintlocks, were drawn up as a guard of honor.

"The comandante," said Señor Perkins, "directs me to extend his apologies to the Señor Capitano Bunker for withholding the salute which is due alike to his country, himself, and his fair company; but fifty years of uninterrupted peace and fog have left his cannon inadequate to polite emergencies, and firmly fixed the tampion of his saluting-gun. But he places the Presidio at your disposition; you will be pleased to make its acquaintance while it is still light; and he will await you in the guard-room."

Left to themselves, the party dispersed like dismissed school-children through the courtyard and corridors, and in the enjoyment of their release from a month's confine-

ment on shipboard stretched their cramped limbs over the ditches, walls, and parapets, to the edge of the glacis.

Everywhere a ruin that was picturesque, a decay that was refined and gentle, a neglect that was graceful, met the eye ; the sharp exterior and reëntering angles were softly rounded and obliterated by overgrowths of semi-tropical creepers ; the abatis was filled by a natural brake of scrub-oak and manzanita ; the clematis flung its long scaling ladders over the escarpment, until Nature, slowly but securely investing the doomed fortress, had lifted a victorious banner of palm from the conquered summit of the citadel ! Some strange convulsions of the earth had completed the victory ; the barbette guns of carved and antique bronze commemorating fruitless and long-forgotten triumphs were dismounted ; one turned in the cheeks of its carriage had a trunion raised piteously in the air like an amputated stump ; another, sinking through its rotting chassis, had buried itself to its chase in the crumbling adobe wall. But above and beyond this gentle chaos of defense stretched the real ramparts and escarpments of Todos Santos — the impenetrable and unassailable fog ! Corroding its brass and iron with saline breath, rotting its wood with unending shadow, sapping its adobe walls with perpetual moisture, and nourishing the obliterating vegetation with its quickening blood, as if laughing to scorn the puny embattlements of men — it still bent around the crumbling ruins the tender grace of an invisible but all-encompassing arm.

Señor Perkins, who had acted as cicerone to the party, pointed out these various mutations with no change from his usual optimism.

"Protected by their peculiar isolation during the late war, there was no necessity for any real fortification of the place. Nevertheless, it affords some occupation and position for our kind friend, Don Miguel, and so serves a ben-

eficial purpose. This little gun," he continued, stopping to attentively examine a small but beautifully carved bronze six-pounder, which showed indications of better care than the others, "seems to be the saluting-gun Don Miguel spoke of. For the last fifty years it has spoken only the language of politeness and courtesy, and yet through want of care the tampion, as you see, has become swollen and choked in its mouth."

"How true in a larger sense," murmured Mrs. Markham, "the habit of courtesy alone preserves the fluency of the heart."

"I know you two are saying something very clever," said Mrs. Brimmer, whose small French slippers and silk stockings were beginning to show their inadequacy to a twilight ramble in the fog; "but I am so slow, and I never catch the point. Do repeat it slowly."

"The señor was only showing us how they managed to shut up a smooth bore in this country," said Crosby gravely. "I wonder when we 're going to have dinner. I suppose old Don Quixote will trot out some of his señoritas. I want to see those choir girls that sang so stunningly awhile ago."

"I suppose you mean the boys — for they 're all boys in the Catholic choirs — but then, perhaps you are joking again. Do tell me if you are, for this is really amusing. I may laugh — may n't I ?" As the discomfited humorist fell again to the rear amidst the laughter of the others, Mrs. Brimmer continued naïvely to Señor Perkins, "Of course, as Don Miguel is a widower, there must be daughters or sisters-in-law who will meet us. Why, the priest, you know — even he — must have nieces. Really, it 's a serious question — if we are to accept his hospitality in a social way. Why don't you ask *him?*" she said, pointing to the green-jacketed subaltern who was accompanying them.

Señor Perkins looked half embarrassed.

"Repeat your question, my dear lady, and I will translate it."

"Ask him if there are any women at the Presidio."

Señor Perkins drew the subaltern aside. Presently he turned to Mrs. Brimmer.

"He says there are four: the wife of the baker, the wife of the saddler, the daughter of the trumpeter, and the niece of the cook."

"Good heavens! we can't meet *them*," said Mrs. Brimmer.

Señor Perkins hesitated.

"Perhaps I ought to have told you," he said blandly, "that the old Spanish notions of etiquette are very strict. The wives of the officials and higher classes do not meet strangers on a first visit, unless they are well known."

"That is n't it," said Winslow, joining them excitedly. "I 've heard the whole story. It 's a good joke. Banks has been bragging about us all, and saying that these ladies had husbands who were great merchants, and, as these chaps consider that all trade is vulgar, you know, they believe we are not fit to associate with their women, don't you see? All, except one — Miss Keene. She 's considered all right. She 's to be introduced to the commander's women, and to the sister of the alcalde."

"She will do nothing of the kind," said Miss Keene indignantly. "If these ladies are not to be received with me, we 'll all go back to the ship together."

She spoke with a quick and perfectly unexpected resolution and independence, so foreign to her usual childlike, half dependent character, that her hearers were astounded. Señor Perkins gazed at her thoughtfully; Brace, Crosby, and Winslow admiringly; her sister passengers with doubt and apprehension.

"There must be some mistake," said Señor Perkins gently. "I will inquire."

He was absent but a few moments. When he returned, his face was beaming.

"It 's a ridiculous misapprehension. Our practical friend Banks, in his zealous attempts to impress the comandante's secretary, who knows a little English, with the importance of Mr. Brimmer's position as a large commission merchant, has, I fear, conveyed only the idea that he was a kind of pawnbroker; while Mr. Markham's trade in hides has established him as a tanner; and Mr. Banks's own flour speculations, of which he is justly proud, have been misinterpreted by him as the work of a successful baker!"

"And what idea did he convey about *you?*" asked Crosby audaciously; "it might be interesting to us to know, for our own satisfaction."

"I fear they did not do me the honor to inquire," replied Señor Perkins, with imperturbable good-humor; "there are some persons, you know, who carry all their worldly possessions palpably about with them. I am one of them. Call me a citizen of the world, with a strong leniency towards young and struggling nationalities; a traveler, at home anywhere; a delighted observer of all things, an admirer of brave men, the devoted slave of charming women — and you have, in one word, a passenger of the good ship Excelsior."

For the first time, Miss Keene noticed a slight irony in Señor Perkins's superabundant fluency, and that he did not conceal his preoccupation over the silent saluting-gun he was still admiring. The approach of Don Miguel and Padre Esteban with a small bevy of ladies, however, quickly changed her thoughts, and detached the señor from her side. Her first swift feminine impression of the fair strangers was that they were plain and dowdy, an impression fully shared by the other lady passengers. But her second observation, that they were more gentle, fascinating, childlike, and feminine than her own countrywomen, was purely

her own. Their loose, undulating figures, guiltless of stays; their extravagance of short, white, heavily flounced skirt, which looked like a petticoat; their lightly wrapped, formless, and hooded shoulders and heads, lent a suggestion of dishabille that Mrs. Brimmer at once resented.

"They might, at least, have dressed themselves," she whispered to Mrs. Markham.

"I really believe," returned Mrs. Markham, "they 've got no bodices on!"

The introductions over, a polyglot conversation ensued in French by the padre and Mrs. Brimmer, and in broken English by Miss Chubb, Miss Keene, and the other passengers with the commander's secretary, varied by occasional scraps of college Latin from Mr. Crosby, the whole aided by occasional appeals to Señor Perkins. The darkness increasing, the party reëntered the courtyard, and, passing through the low-studded guard-room, entered another corridor, which looked upon a second court, inclosed on three sides, the fourth opening upon a broad plaza, evidently the public resort of the little town. Encompassing this open space, a few red-tiled roofs could be faintly seen in the gathering gloom. Chocolate and thin spiced cakes were served in the veranda, pending the preparations for a more formal banquet. Already Miss Keene had been singled out from her companions for the special attentions of her hosts, male and female, to her embarrassment and confusion. Already Doña Isabel, the sister of the alcalde, had drawn her aside, and with caressing frankness had begun to question her in broken English, —

"But Miss Keene is no name. The Doña Keene is of nothing."

"Well, you may call me Eleanor, if you like," said Miss Keene, smiling.

"Doña Leonor — so; that is good," said Doña Isabel, clapping her hands like a child. "But how are you?"

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Keene, greatly amused, "but I don't understand."

"Ah, Caramba! What are you, little one?" Seeing that her guest still looked puzzled, she continued, "Ah! Mother of God! Why are your friends so polite to you? Why does every one love you so?"

"Do they? Well," stammered Miss Keene, with one of her rare, dazzling smiles, and her cheeks girlishly rosy with naïve embarrassment, "I suppose they think I am pretty."

"Pretty! Ah, yes, you are!" said Doña Isabel, gazing at her curiously. "But it is not all that."

"What is it, then?" asked Miss Keene demurely.

"You are a — a — Dama de Grandeza!"

CHAPTER VI

HAIL AND FAREWELL

Supper was served in the inner room opening from the corridor lit by a few swinging lanterns of polished horn and a dozen wax candles of sacerdotal size and suggestion. The apartment, though spacious, was low and crypt-like, and was not relieved by the two deep oven-like hearths that warmed it without the play of firelight. But when the company had assembled it was evident that the velvet jackets, gold lace, silver buttons, and red sashes of the entertainers not only lost their tawdry and theatrical appearance in the half decorous and thoughtful gloom, but actually seemed more in harmony with it than the modern dresses of the guests. It was the Excelsior party who looked strange and bizarre in these surroundings; to the sensitive fancy of Miss Keene, Mrs. Brimmer's Parisian toilet had an air of provincial assumption; her own pretty Zouave jacket and black silk skirt horrified her with its apparent ostentatious eccentricity; and Mrs. Markham and Miss Chubb seemed dowdy and overdressed beside the satin mantillas and black lace of the señoritas. Nor were the gentlemen less *outrés:* the stiff correctness of Mr. Banks, and the lighter foppishness of Winslow and Crosby, not to mention Señor Perkins's more pronounced unconventionality, appeared as burlesques of their own characters in a play. The crowning contrast was reached by Captain Bunker, who, in accordance with the habits of the mercantile marine of that period when in port, wore a shore-going suit of black broadcloth, with a tall hat, high shirt collar, and diamond pin. Seated next to the

commander, it was no longer Don Miguel who looked old-fashioned, it was Captain Bunker who appeared impossible.

Nevertheless, as the meal progressed, lightened by a sweet native wine made from the Mission grape, and stimulated by champagne — a present of Captain Bunker from the cabin lockers of the Excelsior — this contrast, and much of the restraint that it occasioned, seemed to melt away. The passengers became talkative; the commander and his friends unbent, and grew sympathetic and inquiring. The temptation to recite the news of the last half century, and to recount the wonderful strides of civilization in that time, was too great to be resisted by the Excelsior party. That some of them — notwithstanding the caution of Señor Perkins — approached dangerously near the subject of the late war between the United States and Mexico, of which Todos Santos was supposed to be still ignorant, or that Crosby in particular seized upon this opportunity for humorous exaggeration, may be readily imagined. But as the translation of the humorist's speech, as well as the indiscretions of his companions, were left to the señor, in Spanish, and to Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Keene, in French, any imminent danger to the harmony of the evening was averted. Don Ramon Ramirez, the alcalde, a youngish man of evident distinction, sat next to Miss Keene, and monopolized her conversation with a certain curiosity that was both grave and childish in its frank trustfulness. Some of his questions were so simple and incompatible with his apparent intelligence that she unconsciously lowered her voice in answering them, in dread of the ridicule of her companions. She could not resist the impression, which repeatedly obtruded upon her imagination, that the entire population of Todos Santos were a party of lost children, forgotten by their parents, and grown to man and womanhood in utter ignorance of the world.

The commander had, half informally, drunk the health of Captain Bunker, without rising from his seat, when, to

Miss Keene's alarm, Captain Bunker staggered to his feet. He had been drinking freely, as usual; but he was bent on indulging a loquacity which his discipline on shipboard had hitherto precluded, and which had, perhaps, strengthened his solitary habit. His speech was voluble and incoherent, complimentary and tactless, kindly and aggressive, courteous and dogmatic. It was left to Señor Perkins to translate it to the eye and ear of his host without incongruity or offense. This he did so admirably as to elicit not only the applause of the foreigners who did not understand English, but of his own countrymen who did not understand Spanish.

"I feel," said Señor Perkins, in graceful peroration, "that I have done poor justice to the eloquence of this gallant sailor. My unhappy translation cannot offer you that voice, at times trembling with generous emotion, and again inaudible from excessive modesty in the presence of this illustrious assembly — those limbs that waver and bend under the undulations of the chivalrous sentiment which carries him away as if he were still on that powerful element he daily battles with and conquers."

But when coffee and sweets were reached, the crowning triumph of Señor Perkins's oratory was achieved. After an impassioned burst of enthusiasm towards his hosts in their own tongue, he turned towards his own party with bland felicity.

"And how is it with us, dear friends? We find ourselves not in the port we are seeking; not in the goal of our ambition, the haven of our hopes; but on the shores of the decaying past. 'Ever drifting' on one of those

> 'Shifting
> Currents of the restless main,' —

if our fascinating friend, Mrs. Brimmer, will permit us to use the words of her accomplished fellow townsman, H. W. Longfellow, of Boston — we find ourselves borne not to

the busy hum and clatter of modern progress, but to the soft cadences of a dying crusade, and the hush of ecclesiastical repose. In place of the busy marts of commerce and the towering chimneys of labor, we have the ruined embattlements of a warlike age, and the crumbling church of an ancient Mission. Towards the close of an eventful voyage, during which we have been guided by the skillful hand and watchful eye of that gallant navigator, Captain Bunker, we have turned aside from our onward course of progress to look back for a moment upon the faded footprints of those who have so long preceded us, who have lived according to their lights, and whose record is now before us. As I have just stated, our journey is near its end, and we may, in some sense, look upon this occasion, with its sumptuous entertainment, and its goodly company of gallant men and fair women, as a parting banquet. Our voyage has been a successful one. I do not now especially speak of the daring speculations of the distinguished husband of a beautiful lady whose delightful society is known to us all — need I say I refer to Quincy Brimmer, Esq., of Boston" (loud applause) — "whose successful fulfillment of a contract with the Peruvian Government, and the landing of munitions of war at Callao, has checked the uprising of the Quinquinambo insurgents? I do not refer especially to our keen-sighted business friend, Mr. Banks" (applause), "who, by buying up all the flour in Callao, and shipping it to California, has virtually starved into submission the revolutionary party of Arequipa — I do not refer to these admirable illustrations of the relations of commerce and politics, for this, my friends — this is history, and beyond my feeble praise. Let me rather speak of the social and literary triumphs of our little community, of our floating Arcadia — may I say Olympus? Where shall we find another Minerva like Mrs. Markham, another Thalia like Miss Chubb, another Juno like Mrs. Brimmer, worthy of

the Jove-like Quincy Brimmer; another Queen of Love and Beauty like — like" — continued the gallant señor, with an effective oratorical pause, and a profound obeisance to Miss Keene, "like one whose mantling maiden blushes forbid me to name?" (Prolonged applause.) "Where shall we find more worthy mortals to worship them than our young friends, the handsome Brace, the energetic Winslow, the humorous Crosby? When we look back upon our concerts and plays, our minstrel entertainments, with the incomparable performances of our friend Crosby as Brother Bones; our recitations, to which the genius of Mrs. M'Corkle, of Peoria, Illinois, has lent her charm and her manuscript" (a burlesque start of terror from Crosby), "I am forcibly impelled to quote the impassioned words from that gifted woman, —

> 'When idly Life's barque on the billows of Time,
> Drifts hither and yon by eternity's sea;
> On the swift feet of verse and the pinions of rhyme
> My thoughts, Ulricardo, fly ever to thee!'"

"Who 's Ulricardo?" interrupted Crosby, with assumed eagerness, followed by a "Hush!" from the ladies.

"Perhaps I should have anticipated our friend's humorous question," said Señor Perkins, with unassailable good-humor. "Ulricardo, though not my own name, is a poetical substitute for it, and a mere figure of apostrophe. The poem is personal to myself," he continued, with a slight increase of color in his smooth cheek — which did not escape the attention of the ladies, — "purely as an exigency of verse, and that the inspired authoress might more easily express herself to a friend. My acquaintance with Mrs. M'Corkle has been only epistolary. Pardon this digression, my friends, but an allusion to the muse of poetry did not seem to me to be inconsistent with our gathering here. Let me briefly conclude by saying that the occasion is a happy and memorable one; I think I echo the sentiment

of all present when I add that it is one which will not be easily forgotten by either the grateful guests, whose feelings I have tried to express, or the chivalrous hosts, whose kindness I have already so feebly translated."

In the applause that followed, and the clicking of glasses, Señor Perkins slipped away. He mingled a moment with some of the other guests who had already withdrawn to the corridor, lit a cigar, and then passed through a narrow doorway on to the ramparts. Here he strolled to some distance, as if in deep thought, until he reached a spot where the crumbling wall and its fallen débris afforded an easy descent into the ditch. Following the ditch, he turned an angle, and came upon the beach, and the low sound of oars in the invisible offing. A whistle brought the boat to his feet, and without a word he stepped into the stern sheets. A few strokes of the oars showed him that the fog had lifted slightly from the water, and a green light hanging from the side of the Excelsior could be plainly seen. Ten minutes' more steady pulling placed him on her deck, where the second officer stood with a number of the sailors listlessly grouped around him.

"The landing has been completed?" said Señor Perkins interrogatively.

"All except one boat-load more, which waits to take your final instructions," said the mate. "The men have growled a little about it," he added, in a lower tone. "They don't want to lose anything, it seems," he continued, with a half sarcastic laugh.

Señor Perkins smiled peculiarly.

"I am sorry to disappoint them. Who 's that in the boat?" he asked suddenly.

The mate followed the señor's glance.

"It is Yoto. He says he is going ashore, and you will not forbid him."

Señor Perkins approached the ship's side.

"Come here," he said to the man.

The Peruvian sailor rose, but did not make the slightest movement to obey the command.

"You say you are going ashore?" said Perkins blandly.

"Yes, patrono."

"What for?"

"To follow him — the thief, the assassin — who struck me here;" he pointed to his head. "He has escaped again with his booty."

"You are very foolish, my Yoto; he is no thief, and has no booty. They will put *you* in prison, not him."

"*You* say so," said the man surlily. "Perhaps they will hear me — for other things," he added significantly.

"And for this you would abandon the cause?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?" he glanced meaningly at two of his companions, who had approached the side; "perhaps others would. Who is sending the booty ashore, eh?"

"Come out of that boat," said the señor, leaning over the bulwarks with folded arms, and his eyes firmly fixed on the man.

The man did not move. But the señor's hand suddenly flew to the back of his neck, smote violently downwards, and sent eighteen inches of glittering steel hurtling through the air. The bowie-knife entered the upturned throat of the man and buried itself halfway to the hilt. Without a gasp or groan he staggered forward, caught wildly at the side of the ship, and disappeared between the boat and the vessel.

"My lads," said Señor Perkins, turning with a gentle smile towards the faces that in the light of the swinging lantern formed a ghastly circle around him, "when I boarded this ship that had brought aid and succor to our oppressors at Callao, I determined to take possession of it peacefully, without imperiling the peace and property of

the innocent passengers who were intrusted to its care, and without endangering your own lives or freedom. But I made no allowance for *traitors*. The blood that has been shed to-night has not been spilt in obedience to my orders, nor to the cause that we serve; it was from *defiance* of it; and the real and only culprit has just atoned for it."

He stopped, and then stepped back from the gangway, as if to leave it open to the men.

"What I have done," he continued calmly, "I do not ask you to consider either as an example or a warning. You are free to do what *he* would have done," he repeated, with a wave of his hand towards the open gangway and the empty boat. "You are free to break your contract and leave the ship, and I give you my word that I will not lift a hand to prevent it. But if you stay with me," he said, suddenly turning upon them a face as livid as their own, "I swear by the living God, that, if between this and the accomplishment of my design, you as much as shirk or question any order given by me, you shall die the death of that dog who went before you. Choose as you please — but quickly."

The mate was the first to move. Without a word, he crossed over to the señor's side. The men hesitated a moment longer, until one, with a strange, foreign cry, threw himself on his knees before the señor, ejaculating, "Pardon! pardon!" The others followed, some impulsively catching at the hand that had just slain their comrade, and covering it with kisses!

"Pardon, patrono — we are yours."

"You are the State's," said Señor Perkins coldly, with every vestige of his former urbanity gone from his colorless face. "Enough! Go back to your duty." He watched them slink away, and then turned to the mate. "Get the last boat-load ready, and report to me."

From that moment another power seemed to dominate

the ship. The men no longer moved listlessly, or slunk along the deck with perfunctory limbs; a feverish haste and eagerness possessed them; the boat was quickly loaded, and the mysterious debarkation completed in rapidity and silence. This done, the fog once more appeared to rise from the water and softly encompass the ship, until she seemed to be obliterated from its face. In this vague obscurity, from time to time, the faint rattling of chains was heard, the soft creaking of blocks, and later on, the regular rise and fall of oars. And then the darkness fell heavier, the sounds became more and more indistinct and were utterly lost.

Ashore, however, the lanterns still glittered brightly in the courtyard of the Presidio; the noise of laughter and revel still came from the supper-room, and, later, the tinkling of guitars and rhythmical clapping hands showed that the festivities were being wound up by a characteristic fandango. Captain Bunker succumbed early to his potations of fiery aguardiente, and was put to bed in the room of the commander, to whom he had sworn eternal friendship and alliance. It was long past midnight before the other guests were disposed of in the various quarters of the Presidio; but to the ladies were reserved the more ostentatious hospitalities of the alcalde himself, the walls of whose ambitious hacienda raised themselves across the plaza and overlooked the gardens of the Mission.

It was from one of the deep, quaintly barred windows of the hacienda that Miss Keene gazed thoughtfully on the night, unable to compose herself to sleep. An antique guest-chamber had been assigned to her in deference to her wish to be alone, for which she had declined the couch and vivacious prattle of her new friend, Doña Isabel. The events of the day had impressed her more deeply than they had her companions, partly from her peculiar inexperience of the world, and partly from her singular sensitiveness to

external causes. The whole quaint story of the forgotten and isolated settlement, which had seemed to the other passengers as a trivial and half humorous incident, affected her imagination profoundly. When she could escape the attentions of her entertainers, or the frivolities of her companions, she tried to touch the far-off past on the wings of her fancy; she tried to imagine the life of those people, forgetting the world and forgotten by it; she endeavored to picture the fifty years of solitude amidst these decaying ruins, over which even ambition had crumbled and fallen. It seemed to her the true conventual seclusion from the world without the loss of kinship or home influences; she contrasted it with her boarding-school life in the fashionable seminary; she wondered what she would have become had she been brought up here; she thought of the happy ignorance of Doña Isabel, and — shuddered; and yet she felt herself examining the odd furniture of the room with an equally childlike and admiring curiosity. And these people looked upon *her* as a superior being!

From the deep embrasure of the window she could see the tops of the pear and olive trees, in the misty light of an invisible moon that suffused the old Mission garden with an ineffable and angelic radiance. To her religious fancy it seemed to be a spiritual effusion of the church itself, enveloping the two gray dome-shaped towers with an atmosphere and repose of its own, until it became the incarnate mystery and passion where it stood.

She was suddenly startled by a moving shadow beside the wall, almost immediately below her — the figure of a man! He was stealing cautiously towards the church, as if to gain the concealment of the shrubbery that grew beside it, and, furtively glancing from side to side, looked towards her window. She unconsciously drew back, forgetting at the moment that her light was extinguished, and that it was impossible for the stranger to see her.

But she had seen *him*, and in that instant recognized Mr. Hurlstone!

Then he *had* come ashore, and secretly, for the other passengers believed him still on the ship! But what was he doing there? — and why had he not appeared with the others at the entertainment? She could understand his avoidance of them from what she knew of his reserved and unsocial habits; but when he could so naturally have remained on shipboard, she could not, at first, conceive why he should wish to prowl around the town at the risk of detection. The idea suddenly occurred to her that he had had another attack of his infirmity and was walking in his sleep, and for an instant she thought of alarming the house, that some one might go to his assistance. But his furtive movements had not the serene impassibility of the somnambulist. Another thought withheld her; he had looked up at her window! Did he know she was there? A faint stirring of shame and pleasure sent a slight color to her cheek. But he had gained the corner of the shrubbery and was lost in the shadow. She turned from the window. A gentle sense of vague and half maternal pity suffused her soft eyes as she at last sought her couch and fell into a deep slumber.

Towards daybreak a wind arose over the sleeping town and far outlying waters. It breathed through the leaves of the Mission garden, brushed away the clinging mists from the angles of the towers, and restored the sharp outlines of the ruined fortifications. It swept across the unruffled sea to where the Excelsior, cradled in the softly heaving bay, had peacefully swung at anchor on the previous night, and lifted the snowy curtain of the fog to seaward as far as the fringe of surf, a league away.

But the cradle of the deep was empty — the ship was gone!

CHAPTER VII

THE GENTLE CASTAWAYS

Miss Keene was awakened from a heavy sleep by a hurried shake of her shoulder and an indefinite feeling of alarm. Opening her eyes, she was momentarily dazed by the broad light of day, and the spectacle of Mrs. Brimmer, pale and agitated, in a half-Spanish dishabille, standing at her bedside.

"Get up and dress yourself, my dear, at once," she said hurriedly, but at the same time attentively examining Miss Keene's clothes, that were lying on the chair: "and thank Heaven you came here in an afternoon dress, and not in an evening costume like mine! For something awful has happened, and Heaven only knows whether we 'll ever see a stitch of our clothes again."

"*What* has happened?" asked Miss Keene impatiently, sitting up in bed, more alarmed at the unusual circumstance of Mrs. Brimmer's unfinished toilet than at her incomplete speech.

"What, indeed! Nobody knows; but it 's something awful — a mutiny, or shipwreck, or piracy. But there 's your friend, the commander, calling out the troops; and such a set of Christy Minstrels you never saw before! There 's the alcalde summoning the council; there 's Mr. Banks raving, and running round for a steamboat — as if these people ever heard of such a thing! — and Captain Bunker, what with rage and drink, gone off in a fit of delirium tremens, and locked up in his room! And the Excelsior gone — the Lord knows where!"

"Gone!" repeated Miss Keene, hurrying on her clothes. "Impossible! What does Father Esteban tell you? What does Doña Isabel say?"

"That's the most horrible part of it! Do you know those wretched idiots believe it's some political revolution among ourselves, like their own miserable government. I believe that baby Isabel thinks that King George and Washington have something to do with it; at any rate, they're anxious to know to what side you belong! So, for goodness' sake! if you have to humor them, say we're all on the same side — I mean, don't you and Mrs. Markham go against Miss Chubb and me."

Scarcely knowing whether to laugh or cry at Mrs. Brimmer's incoherent statement, Miss Keene hastily finished dressing as the door flew open to admit the impulsive Doña Isabel and her sister Juanita. The two Mexican girls threw themselves in Miss Keene's arms, and then suddenly drew back with a movement of bashful and diffident respect.

"Do, pray, ask them, for I dare n't," whispered Mrs. Brimmer, trying to clasp a mantilla around her, "how this thing is worn, and if they have n't got something like a decent bonnet to lend me for a day or two?"

"The señora has not then heard that her goods, and all the goods of the señores and señoras, have been discovered safely put ashore at the Embarcadero?"

"No?" said Mrs. Brimmer eagerly.

"Ah, yes!" responded Doña Isabel. "Since the señora is not of the revolutionary party."

Mrs. Brimmer cast a supplicatory look at Miss Keene, and hastily quitted the room. Miss Keene would have as quickly followed her, but the young Ramirez girls threw themselves again tragically upon her breast, and, with a mysterious gesture of silence, whispered, —

"Fear nothing, excellencia! We are yours — we will

die for you, no matter what Don Ramon, or the comandante, or the ayuntamiento, shall decide. Trust us, little one! — pardon — excellencia, we mean."

"What *is* the matter?" said Miss Keene, now thoroughly alarmed, and releasing herself from the twining arms about her. "For Heaven's sake let me go! I must see somebody! Where is — where is Mrs. Markham?"

"The Markham? Is it the severe one? — as thus," — said Doña Isabel, striking an attitude of infantine portentousness.

"Yes," said Miss Keene, smiling in spite of her alarm.

"She is arrested."

"Arrested!" said Eleanor Keene, her cheeks aflame with indignation. "For what? Who dare do this thing?"

"The comandante. She has a missive — a dispatch from the insurrectionaries."

Without another word, and feeling that she could stand the suspense no longer, Miss Keene forced her way past the young girls, unheeding their cries of consternation and apology, and quickly reached the patio. A single glance showed her that Mrs. Brimmer was gone. With eyes and cheeks still burning, she swept past the astounded peons, through the gateway, into the open plaza. Only one idea filled her mind — to see the commander, and demand the release of her friend. How she should do it, with what arguments she should enforce her demand, never occurred to her. She did not even think of asking the assistance of Mr. Brace, Mr. Crosby, or any of her fellow passengers. The consciousness of some vague crisis that she alone could meet possessed her completely.

The plaza was swarming with a strange rabble of peons and soldiery; of dark, lowering faces, odd-looking weapons and costumes, mules, mustangs, and cattle — a heterogeneous mass, swayed by some fierce excitement. That she saw

none of the Excelsior party among them did not surprise her; an instinct of some catastrophe more serious than Mrs. Brimmer's vague imaginings frightened but exalted her. With head erect, leveled brows, and bright, determined eyes she walked deliberately into the square. The crowd parted and gave way before this beautiful girl, with her bared head and its invincible crest of chestnut curls. Presently they began to follow her, with a compressed murmur of admiration, until, before she was halfway across the plaza, the sentries beside the gateway of the Presidio were astonished at the vision of a fair-haired and triumphant Pallas, who appeared to be leading the entire population of Todos Santos to victorious attack. In vain a solitary bugle blew, in vain the rolling drum beat an alarm, the sympathetic guard only presented arms as Miss Keene, flushed and excited, her eyes darkly humid with gratified pride, swept past them into the actual presence of the bewildered and indignant comandante.

The only feminine consciousness she retained was that she was more relieved at her deliverance from the wild cattle and unbroken horses of her progress than from the Indians and soldiers.

"I want to see Mrs. Markham, and to know by what authority she is arrested," said Miss Keene boldly.

"The señor comandante can hold no conference with you until you disperse your party," interpreted the secretary.

She was about to hurriedly reply that she knew nothing of the crowd that had accompanied her; but she was withheld by a newly-born instinct of tact.

"How do I know that I shall not be arrested, like my friend?" she said quickly. "She is as innocent as myself."

"The comandante pledges himself, as a hidalgo, that you shall not be harmed."

Her first impulse was to advance to the nearest intruders at the gate and say, "Do go away, please;" but she was doubtful of its efficiency, and was already too exalted by the situation to be satisfied with its prosaic weakness. But her newly developed diplomacy again came to her aid. "You may tell them so, if you choose, I cannot answer for them," she said, with apparent dark significance.

The secretary advanced on the corridor and exchanged a few words with her more impulsive followers. Miss Keene, goddess-like and beautiful, remained erect behind him, and sent them a dazzling smile and ravishing wave of her little hand. The crowd roared with an effusive and bovine delight that half frightened her, and with a dozen "Viva la Reyna Americanas!" she was hurried by the comandante into the guard-room.

"You ask to know of what the Señora Markham is accused," said the commander, more gently. "She has received correspondence from the pirate — Perkins!"

"The pirate — Perkins!" said Miss Keene, with indignant incredulity.

"The buccaneer who wrote that letter. Read it to her, Manuel."

The secretary took his eyes from the young girl's glowing face, coughed slightly, and then read as follows: —

On Board the Excelsior, of the Quinquinambo Independent States Navy, *August* 8, 1854.

To Captain Bunker: Sir, . . .

"But this is not addressed to *you!*" interrupted Miss Keene indignantly.

"The Captain Bunker is a raving madman," said the commander gravely. "Read on!"

The color gradually faded from the young girl's cheek as the secretary continued in a monotonous voice: —

I have the honor to inform you that the barque Excelsior was, on the 8th of July, 1854, and the first year of the Quinquinambo Independence, formally condemned by the Federal Council of Quinquinambo, for having aided and assisted the enemy with munitions of war and supplies, against the law of nations, and the tacit and implied goodwill between the Republic of the United States and the struggling Confederacies of South America; and that, in pursuance thereof, and under the law of reprisals and letters of marque, was taken possession of by me yesterday. The goods and personal effects belonging to the passengers and yourself have been safely landed at the Embarcadero of Todos Santos — a neutral port — by my directions; my interpretation of the orders of the Federal Council excepting innocent non-combatants and their official protector from confiscation or amercement.

I take the liberty of requesting you to hand the inclosed order on the Treasury of the Quinquinambo Confederate States to Don Miguel Briones, in payment of certain stores and provisions, and of a piece of ordnance known as the saluting-cannon of the Presidio of Todos Santos. *Vigilancia!*

Your obedient servant,

LEONIDAS BOLIVAR PERKINS,
Generalissimo Commanding Land and Sea Forces,
Quinquinambo Independent States.

In her consternation at this fuller realization of the vague catastrophe, Miss Keene still clung to the idea that had brought her there.

"But Mrs. Markham has nothing to do with all this?"

"Then why does she refuse to give up her secret correspondence with the pirate Perkins?" returned the secretary.

Miss Keene hesitated. Had Mrs. Markham any previous knowledge of the señor's real character?

"Why don't you arrest the men?" she said scornfully. "There is Mr. Banks, Mr. Crosby, Mr. Winslow, and Mr. Brace." She uttered the last name more contemptuously, as she thought of that young gentleman's protestations and her present unprotected isolation.

"They are already arrested and removed to San Antonio, a league hence," returned the secretary. "It is fact enough that they have confessed that their Government has seized the Mexican province of California, and that they were on their way to take possession of it."

Miss Keene's heart sank.

"But you knew all this yesterday," she faltered; "and our war with Mexico is all over years ago."

"We did not know it last night at the banquet, señora; nor would we have known it but for this treason and division in your own party."

A sudden light flashed upon Miss Keene's mind. She now comprehended the advances of Doña Isabel. Extravagant and monstrous as it seemed, these people evidently believed that a revolution had taken place in the United States; that the two opposing parties had been represented by the passengers of the Excelsior; and that one party had succeeded, headed by the indomitable Perkins. If she could be able to convince them of their blunder, would it be wise to do so? She thought of Mrs. Brimmer's supplication to be ranged "on her side," and realized with feminine quickness that the situation might be turned to her countrymen's advantage. But which side had Todos Santos favored? It was left to her woman's wit to discover this, and conceive a plan to rescue her helpless companions.

Her suspense was quickly relieved. The commander and his secretary exchanged a few words.

"The comandante will grant Doña Leonora's request," said the secretary, "if she will answer a question."

"What is it?" responded Miss Keene, with inward trepidation.

"The Señora Markham is perhaps beloved by the pirate Perkins?"

In spite of her danger, in spite of the uncertain fate hanging over her party, Miss Keene could with difficulty repress a half hysterical inclination to laugh. Even then, it escaped in a sudden twinkle of her eye, which both the commander and his subordinate were quick to notice, as she replied demurely, "Perhaps."

It was enough for the commander. A gleam of antique archness and venerable raillery lit up his murky, tobacco-colored pupils; a spasm of gallantry crossed the face of the secretary.

"Ah — what would you? — it is the way of the world," said the commander. "We comprehend. Come!"

He led the way across the corridor, and suddenly opened a small barred door. Whatever preconceived idea Miss Keene may have had of her unfortunate countrywoman immured in a noisome cell, and guarded by a stern jailer, was quite dissipated by the soft misty sunshine that flowed in through the open door. The prison of Mrs. Markham was a part of the old glacis which had been allowed to lapse into a wild garden that stretched to the edge of the sea. There was a summer-house built on — and partly from — a crumbling bastion, and here, under the shade of tropical creepers, the melancholy captive was comfortably writing, with her portable desk on her knee, and a traveling-bag at her feet. A Saratoga trunk of obtrusive proportions stood in the centre of the peaceful vegetation, like a newly raised altar to an unknown deity. The only suggestion of martial surveillance was an Indian soldier, whose musket, reposing on the ground near Mrs. Markham, he had exchanged for the rude mattock with which he was quietly digging.

The two women, with a cry of relief, flew into each other's arms. The commander and his secretary discreetly retired to an angle of the wall.

"I find everything as I left it, my dear, even to my slipper-bag," said Mrs. Markham. "They 've forgotten nothing."

"But you are a captive!" said Eleanor. "What does it mean?"

"Nothing, my dear. I gave them a piece of my mind," said Mrs. Markham, looking, however, as if that mental offering had by no means exhausted her capital, "and I have written six pages to the governor at Mazatlan, and a full account to Mr. Markham."

"And they won't get them in thirty years!" said Miss Keene impetuously. "But where is this letter from Señor Perkins? And for Heaven's sake, tell me if you had the least suspicion before of anything that has happened."

"Not in the least. The man is mad, my dear, and I really believe driven so by that absurd Illinois woman's poetry. Did you ever see anything so ridiculous — and shameful, too — as the 'Ulricardo' business? I don't wonder he colored so."

Miss Keene winced with annoyance. Was everybody going crazy, or was there anything more in this catastrophe that had only enfeebled the minds of her countrywomen! For here was the severe, strong-minded Mrs. Markham actually preoccupied, like Mrs. Brimmer, with utterly irrelevant particulars, and apparently powerless to grasp the fact that they were abandoned on a half hostile strand, and cut off by half a century from the rest of the world.

"As to the letter," said Mrs. Markham quietly, "there it is. There 's nothing in it that might not have been written by a friend."

Miss Keene took the letter. It was written in a delicate, almost feminine hand. She could not help noticing

that in one or two instances corrections had been made and blots carefully removed with an eraser.

Midnight, on the Excelsior.

My Friend: When you receive this I shall probably be once more on the bosom of that mysterious and mighty element whose majesty has impressed us, whose poetry we have loved, and whose moral lessons, I trust, have not been entirely thrown away upon us. I go to the deliverance of one of those oppressed nations whose history I have often recited to you, and in whose destiny you have from time to time expressed a womanly sympathy. While it is probable, therefore, that my *motives* may not be misunderstood by you, or even other dear friends of the Excelsior, it is by no means impossible that the celerity and unexpectedness of my *action* may not be perfectly appreciated by the careless mind, and may seem to require some explanation. Let me then briefly say that the idea of debarking your goods and chattels, and parting from your delightful company at Todos Santos, only occurred to me on our unexpected — shall I say *Providential?* — arrival at that spot; and the necessity of expedition forbade me either inviting your coöperation or soliciting your confidence. Human intelligence is variously constituted — or, to use a more homely phrase, 'many men have many minds' — and it is not impossible that a premature disclosure of my plans might have jeopardized that harmony which you know it has been my desire to promote. It was my original intention to have landed you at Mazatlan, a place really inferior in climate and natural attractions to Todos Santos, although, perhaps, more easy of access and egress; but the presence of an American steamer in the offing would have invested my enterprise with a certain publicity foreign, I think, to all our tastes. Taking advantage, therefore, of my knowledge of the peninsular coast, and the pardonable ignorance

of Captain Bunker, I endeavored, through my faithful subordinates, to reach a less known port, and a coast rarely frequented by reason of its prevailing fog. Here occurred one of those dispensations of an overruling power which, dear friend, we have so often discussed. We fell in with an unknown current, and were guided by a mysterious hand into the bay of Todos Santos!

You know of my belief in the infinite wisdom and benignity of events; you have, dear friend, with certain feminine limitations, shared it with me. Could there have been a more perfect illustration of it than the power that led us here? On a shore, historic in interest, beautiful in climate, hospitable in its people, utterly freed from external influences, and absolutely without a compromising future, you are landed, my dear friend, with your youthful companions. From the crumbling ruins of a decaying Past you are called to construct an Arcadia of your own; the rudiments of a new civilization are within your grasp; the cost of existence is comparatively trifling; the various sums you have with you, which even in the chaos of revolution I have succeeded in keeping intact, will more than suffice to your natural wants for years to come. Were I not already devoted to the task of freeing Quinquinambo, I should willingly share this Elysium with you all. But, to use the glowing words of Mrs. M'Corkle, slightly altering the refrain: —

> 'Ah, stay me not! With flying feet
> O'er desert sands, I rush to greet
> My fate, my love, my life, my sweet
> Quinquinambo!'

I venture to intrust to your care two unpublished manuscripts of that gifted woman. The dangers that may environ my present mission, the vicissitudes of battle by sea or land, forbid my imperiling their natural descent to posterity. You, my dear friend, will preserve them for the ages to come, occasionally refreshing yourself, from time to time, from that Parnassian spring.

Adieu! my friend. I look around the familiar cabin, and miss your gentle faces. I feel as Jason might have felt, alone on the deck of the Argo when his companions were ashore, except that I know of no Circean influences to mar their destiny. In examining the state-rooms to see if my orders for the complete restoration of passengers' property had been carried out, I allowed myself to look into yours. Lying alone, forgotten and overlooked, I saw a peculiar jet hairpin which I think I have observed in the coils of your tresses. May I venture to keep this gentle instrument as a reminder of the superior intellect it has so often crowned? Adieu, my friend. Ever yours,

LEONIDAS BOLIVAR PERKINS.

"Well?" said Mrs. Markham impatiently, as Miss Keene remained motionless with the letter in her hand.

"It seems like a ridiculous nightmare! I can't understand it at all. The man that wrote this letter may be mad, — but he is neither a pirate nor a thief — and yet" —

"He a pirate?" echoed Mrs. Markham indignantly; "he 's nothing of the kind! It 's not even his *fault!*"

"Not his fault?" repeated Miss Keene; "are you mad, too?"

"No, — nor a fool, my dear! Don't you see? It 's all the fault of Banks and Brimmer for compromising the vessel: of that stupid, drunken captain for permitting it. Señor Perkins is a liberator, a patriot, who has periled himself and his country to treat us magnanimously. Don't you see it? It 's like that Banks and that Mrs. Brimmer to call *him* a pirate! I 've a good mind to give the commander my opinion of *them*."

"Hush!" said Miss Keene, with a sudden recollection of the commander's suspicions, "for Heaven's sake; you do not know what you are saying. Look! they were talking with that strange man, and now they are coming this way."

The commander and his secretary approached them. They were both more than usually grave; but the look of inquiry and suspicion with which they regarded the two women was gone from their eyes.

"The señor comandante says you are free, señoras, and begs you will only decide whether you will remain his guests or the guests of the alcalde. But for the present he cannot allow you any communication with the prisoners of San Antonio."

"There is further news?" said Miss Keene faintly, with a presentiment of worse complications.

"There is! A body from the Excelsior has been washed on shore."

The two women turned pale.

"In the pocket of the murdered man is an accusation against one Señor Hurlstone, who was concealed on the ship; who came not ashore openly with the other passengers, but who escaped in secret, and is now hiding somewhere in Todos Santos."

"And you suspect him of this infamous act?" said Eleanor, forgetting all prudence in her indignation. "You are deceiving yourself. He is as innocent as I am!"

The commander and the secretary smiled sapiently, but gently.

"The señor comandante believes you, Doña Leonora: the Señor Hurlstone is innocent of the piracy. He is, of a surety, the leader of the Opposition."

CHAPTER VIII

IN SANCTUARY

When James Hurlstone reached the shelter of the shrubbery he leaned exhaustedly against the adobe wall, and looked back upon the garden he had just traversed. At its lower extremity a tall hedge of cactus reinforced the crumbling wall with a *cheval de frise* of bristling thorns; it was through a gap in this green barrier that he had found his way a few hours before, as his torn clothes still testified. At one side ran the low wall of the alcalde's casa, a mere line of dark shadow in that strange diaphanous mist that seemed to suffuse all objects. The gnarled and twisted branches of pear-trees, gouty with old age, bent so low as to impede any progress under their formal avenues; out of a tangled labyrinth of fig-trees, here and there a single plume of feathery palm swam in a drowsy upper radiance. The shrubbery around him, of some unknown variety, exhaled a faint perfume; he put out his hand to grasp what appeared to be a young catalpa, and found it the trunk of an enormous passion vine, that, creeping softly upward, had at last invaded the very belfry of the dim tower above him; and touching it, his soul seemed to be lifted with it out of the shadow.

The great hush and quiet that had fallen like a benediction on every sleeping thing around him; the deep and passionless repose that seemed to drop from the bending boughs of the venerable trees; the cool, restful, earthy breath of the shadowed mould beneath him, touched only by a faint jessamine-like perfume as of a dead passion, lulled the hurried beatings of his heart and calmed the feverish

tremor of his limbs. He allowed himself to sink back against the wall, his hands tightly clasped before him. Gradually the set, abstracted look of his eyes faded and became suffused, as if moistened by that celestial mist. Then he rose quickly, drew his sleeve hurriedly across his lashes, and began slowly to creep along the wall again.

Either the obscurity of the shrubbery became greater or he was growing preoccupied; but in steadying himself by the wall he had, without perceiving it, put his hand upon a rude door that, yielding to his pressure, opened noiselessly into a dark passage. Without apparent reflection he entered, followed the passage a few steps until it turned abruptly; turning with it, he found himself in the body of the Mission Church of Todos Santos. A swinging-lamp, that burned perpetually before an effigy of the Virgin Mother, threw a faint light on the single rose-window behind the high altar; another, suspended in a low archway, apparently lit the open door of the passage towards the refectory. By the stronger light of the latter Hurlstone could see the barbaric red and tarnished gold of the rafters that formed the straight roof. The walls were striped with equally bizarre coloring, half Moorish and half Indian. A few hangings of dyed and painted cloths with heavy fringes were disposed on either side of the chancel, like the flaps of a wigwam; and the aboriginal suggestion was further repeated in a quantity of colored beads and sea-shells that decked the communion-rails. The stations of the Cross, along the walls, were commemorated by paintings, evidently by a native artist — to suit the same barbaric taste; while a larger picture of San Francisco d'Assisis, under the choir, seemed to belong to an older and more artistic civilization. But the sombre half-light of the two lamps mellowed and softened the harsh contrast of these details until the whole body of the church appeared filled with a vague harmonious shadow. The air, heavy with the odors of past incense, seemed to be a part

of that expression, as if the solemn and sympathetic twilight became palpable in each deep, long-drawn inspiration.

Again overcome by the feeling of repose and peacefulness, Hurlstone sank upon a rude settle, and bent his head and folded arms over a low railing before him. How long he sat there, allowing the subtle influence to transfuse and possess his entire being, he did not know. The faint twitter of birds suddenly awoke him. Looking up, he perceived that it came from the vacant square of the tower above him, open to the night and suffused with its mysterious radiance. In another moment the roof of the church was swiftly crossed and recrossed with tiny and adventurous wings. The mysterious light had taken an opaline color. Morning was breaking.

The slow rustling of a garment, accompanied by a soft but heavy tread, sounded from the passage. He started to his feet as the priest, whom he had seen on the deck of the Excelsior, entered the church from the refectory. The padre was alone. At the apparition of a stranger, torn and disheveled, he stopped involuntarily and cast a hasty look towards the heavy silver ornaments on the altar. Hurlstone noticed it, and smiled bitterly.

"Don't alarm yourself. I only sought this place for shelter."

He spoke in French — the language he had heard Padre Esteban address to Mrs. Brimmer. But the priest's quick eye had already detected his own mistake. He lifted his hand with a sublime gesture towards the altar, and said, —

"You are right! Where should you seek shelter but here?"

The reply was so unexpected that Hurlstone was silent. His lips quivered slightly.

"And if it were *sanctuary* I was seeking?" he said.

"You would first tell me why you sought it," said Padre Esteban gently.

Hurlstone looked at him irresolutely for a moment, and then said, with the hopeless desperation of a man anxious to anticipate his fate, —

"I am a passenger on the ship you boarded yesterday. I came ashore with the intention of concealing myself somewhere here until she had sailed. When I tell you that I am not a fugitive from justice, that I have committed no offense against the ship or her passengers, nor have I any intention of doing so, but that I only wish concealment from their knowledge for twenty-four hours, you will know enough to understand that you run no risk in giving me assistance. I can tell you no more."

"I did not see you with the other passengers, either on the ship or ashore," said the priest. "How did you come here?"

"I swam ashore before they left. I did not know they had any idea of landing here; I expected to be the only one, and there would have been no need for concealment then. But I am not lucky," he added, with a bitter laugh.

The priest glanced at his garments, which bore the traces of the sea, but remained silent.

"Do you think I am lying?"

The old priest lifted his head with a gesture.

"Not to me — but to God!"

The young man followed the gesture, and glanced around the barbaric church with a slight look of scorn. But the profound isolation, the mystic seclusion, and above all the complete obliteration of that world and civilization he shrank from and despised, again subdued and overcame his rebellious spirit. He lifted his eyes to the priest.

"Nor to God," he said gravely.

"Then why withhold anything from Him here?" said the priest gently.

"I am not a Catholic — I do not believe in confession," said Hurlstone doggedly, turning aside.

But Padre Esteban laid his large brown hand on the young man's shoulder. Touched by some occult suggestion in its soft contact, he sank again into his seat.

"Yet you ask for the sanctuary of His house — a sanctuary bought by that contrition whose first expression is the bared and open soul! To the first worldly shelter you sought — the peon's hut or the alcalde's casa — you would have thought it necessary to bring a story. You would not conceal from the physician whom you asked for balsam either the wound, the symptoms, or the cause? Enough," he said kindly, as Hurlstone was about to reply. "You shall have your request. You shall stay here. I will be your physician, and will salve your wounds; if any poison I know not of rankle there, you will not blame me, son, but perhaps you will assist me to find it. I will give you a secluded cell in the dormitory until the ship has sailed. And then" —

He dropped quietly on the settle, took the young man's hand paternally in his own, and gazed into his eyes as if he read his soul.

And then . . . Ah, yes . . . What then? Hurlstone glanced once more around him. He thought of the quiet night; of the great peace that had fallen upon him since he had entered the garden, and the promise of a greater peace that seemed to breathe with the incense from those venerable walls. He thought of that crumbling barrier, that even in its ruin seemed to shut out, more completely than anything he had conceived, his bitter past, and the bitter world that recalled it. He thought of the long days to come, when, forgetting and forgotten, he might find a new life among these simple aliens, themselves forgotten by the world. He had thought of this once before in the garden; it occurred to him again in this Lethe-like oblivion of the little church, in the kindly pressure of the priest's hand. The ornaments no longer looked uncouth and bar-

baric — rather they seemed full of some new spiritual significance. He suddenly lifted his eyes to Padre Esteban, and, half rising to his feet, said, —

"Are we alone?"

"We are; it is a half-hour yet before mass," said the priest.

"My story will not last so long," said the young man hurriedly, as if fearing to change his mind. "Hear me, then — it is no crime nor offense to any one; more than that, it concerns no one but myself — it is of" —

"A woman," said the priest softly. "So! we will sit down, my son."

He lifted his hand with a soothing gesture — the movement of a physician who has just arrived at an easy diagnosis of certain uneasy symptoms. There was also a slight suggestion of an habitual toleration, as if even the seclusion of Todos Santos had not been entirely free from the invasion of the primal passion.

Hurlstone waited for an instant, but then went on rapidly.

"It is of a woman, who has cursed my life, blasted my prospects, and ruined my youth; a woman who gained my early affection only to blight and wither it; a woman who should be nearer to me and dearer than all else, and yet who is further than the uttermost depths of hell from me in sympathy or feeling; a woman that I should cleave to, but from whom I have been flying, ready to face shame, disgrace, oblivion, even that death which alone can part us: for that woman is — my wife."

He stopped, out of breath, with fixed eyes and a rigid mouth. Father Esteban drew a snuff-box from his pocket, and a large handkerchief. After blowing his nose violently, he took a pinch of snuff, wiped his lip, and replaced the box.

"A bad habit, my son," he said apologetically, "but an old man's weakness. Go on."

"I met her first five years ago — the wife of another man. Don't misjudge me, it was no lawless passion; it was a friendship, I believed, due to her intellectual qualities as much as to her womanly fascinations; for I was a young student, lodging in the same house with her, in an academic town. Before I ever spoke to her of love she had confided to me her own unhappiness — the uncongeniality of her married life, the harshness and even brutality of her husband. Even a man less in love than I was could have seen the truth of this — the contrast of the coarse, sensual, and vulgar man with an apparently refined and intelligent woman; but any one else except myself would have suspected that such a union was not merely a sacrifice of the woman. I believed her. It was not until long afterwards that I learned that her marriage had been a condonation of her youthful errors by a complaisant bridegroom; that her character had been saved by a union that was a mutual concession. But I loved her madly; and when she finally got a divorce from her uncongenial husband, I believed it less an expression of her love for me than an act of justice. I did not know at the time that they had arranged the divorce together, as they had arranged their marriage, by equal concessions.

"I was the only son of a widowed mother, whose instincts were from the first opposed to my friendship with this woman, and what she prophetically felt would be its result. Unfortunately, both she and my friends were foolish enough to avow their belief that the divorce was obtained solely with a view of securing me as a successor; and it was this argument more than any other that convinced me of my duty to protect her. Enough, I married, not only in spite of all opposition — but *because* of it.

"My mother would have reconciled herself to the marriage, but my wife never forgave the opposition, and, by some hellish instinct divining that her power over me might

be weakened by maternal influence, precipitated a quarrel which forever separated us. With the little capital left by my father, divided between my mother and myself, I took my wife to a western city. Our small income speedily dwindled under the debts of her former husband, which she had assumed to purchase her freedom. I endeavored to utilize a good education and some accomplishments in music and the languages by giving lessons and by contributing to the press. In this my wife first made a show of assisting me, but I was not long in discovering that her intelligence was superficial and shallow, and that the audacity of expression, which I had believed to be originality of conviction, was simply shamelessness, and a desire for notoriety. She had a facility in writing sentimental poetry, which had been efficacious in her matrimonial confidences, but which editors of magazines and newspapers found to be shallow and insincere. To my astonishment, she remained unaffected by this, as she was equally impervious to the slights and sneers that continually met us in society. At last the inability to pay one of her former husband's claims brought to me a threat and an anonymous letter. I laid them before her, when a scene ensued which revealed the blindness of my folly in all its hideous hopelessness : she accused me of complicity in her divorce, and deception in regard to my own fortune. In a speech, whose language was a horrible revelation of her early habits, she offered to arrange a divorce from me as she had from her former husband. She gave as a reason her preference for another, and her belief that the scandal of a suit would lend her a certain advertisement and prestige. It was a combination of Messalina and Mrs. Jarley " —

" Pardon ! I remember not a Madame Jarley," said the priest.

" Of viciousness and commercial calculation," continued Hurlstone hurriedly. " I don't remember what happened;

she swore that I struck her! Perhaps — God knows! But she failed, even before a western jury, to convict me of cruelty. The judge that thought me half insane would not believe me brutal, and her application for divorce was lost.

"I need not tell you that the same friends who had opposed my marriage now came forward to implore me to allow her to break our chains. I refused. I swear to you it was from no lingering love for her, for her presence drove me mad; it was from no instinct of revenge or jealousy, for I should have welcomed the man who would have taken her out of my life and memory. But I could not bear the idea of taking her first husband's place in her hideous comedy; I could not purchase my freedom at that price — at any price. I was told that I could get a divorce against *her*, and stand forth before the world untrammeled and unstained. But I could not stand before *myself* in such an attitude. *I* knew that the shackles I had deliberately forged could not be loosened except by death. I knew that the stains of her would cling to me and become a part of my own sin, even as the sea I plunged into yesterday to escape her, though it has dried upon me, has left its bitter salt behind.

"When she knew my resolve, she took her revenge by dragging my name through the successive levels to which she descended. Under the plea that the hardly-earned sum I gave to her maintenance apart from me was not sufficient, she utilized her undoubted beauty and more doubtful talent in amateur entertainments — and, finally, on the stage. She was openly accompanied by her lover, who acted as her agent, in the hope of goading me to a divorce. Suddenly she disappeared. I thought she had forgotten me. I obtained an honorable position in New York. One night I entered a theatre devoted to burlesque opera and the exhibition of a popular actress, known as the Western Thalia, whose beautiful and audaciously draped figure was the talk

of the town. I recognized my wife in this star of nudity; more than that, she recognized me. The next day, in addition to the usual notice, the real name of the actress was given in the morning papers, with a sympathizing account of her romantic and unfortunate marriage. I renounced my position, and, taking advantage of an offer from an old friend in California, resolved to join him secretly there. My mother had died broken-hearted; I was alone in the world. But my wife discovered my intention; and when I reached Callao, I heard that she had followed me, by way of the Isthmus of Panama, and that probably she would anticipate me in Mazatlan, where we were to stop. The thought of suicide haunted me during the rest of that horrible voyage; only my belief that she would make it appear as a tacit confession of my guilt saved me from that last act of weakness."

He stopped and shuddered. Padre Esteban again laid his hand softly upon him.

"It was God who spared you that sacrifice of soul and body," he said gently.

"I thought it was God that suggested to me to make the *simulation* of that act the means of separating myself from her forever. When we neared Mazatlan, I conceived the idea of hiding myself in the hold of the Excelsior until she had left that port, in the hope that it would be believed that I had fallen overboard. I succeeded in secreting myself, but was discovered at the same time that the unexpected change in the ship's destination rendered concealment unnecessary. As we did not put in at Mazatlan, nobody suspected my discovery in the hold to be anything but the accident that I gave it out to be. I felt myself saved the confrontation of the woman at Mazatlan; but I knew she would pursue me to San Francisco.

"The strange dispensation of Providence that brought us into this unknown port gave me another hope of escape and

oblivion. While you and the commander were boarding the Excelsior, I slipped from the cabin window into the water; I was a good swimmer, and reached the shore in safety. I concealed myself in the ditch of the Presidio until I saw the passengers' boats returning with them, when I sought the safer shelter of this Mission. I made my way through a gap in the hedge and lay under your olive-trees, hearing the voices of my companions, beyond the walls, till past midnight. I then groped my way along the avenue of pear-trees till I came to another wall, and a door that opened to my accidental touch. I entered, and found myself here. You know the rest."

He had spoken with the rapid and unpent fluency of a man who cared more to relieve himself of an oppressive burden than to impress his auditor; yet the restriction of a foreign tongue had checked repetition or verbosity. Without imagination he had been eloquent; without hopefulness he had been convincing. Father Esteban rose, holding both his hands.

"My son, in the sanctuary which you have claimed there is no divorce. The woman who has ruined your life could not be your wife. As long as her first husband lives, she is forever his wife, bound by a tie which no human law can sever!"

CHAPTER IX

AN OPEN-AIR PRISON

An hour after mass Father Esteban had quietly installed Hurlstone in a small cell-like apartment off the refectory. The household of the priest consisted of an old Indian woman of fabulous age and miraculous propriety, two Indian boys who served at mass, a gardener, and a muleteer. The first three, who were immediately in attendance upon the priest, were cognizant of a stranger's presence, but, under instructions from the reverend padre, were loyally and superstitiously silent; the vocations of the gardener and muleteer made any intrusion from them impossible. A breakfast of fruit, tortillas, chocolate, and red wine, of which Hurlstone partook sparingly and only to please his entertainer, nevertheless seemed to restore his strength, as it did the padre's equanimity. For the old man had been somewhat agitated during mass, and, except that his early morning congregation was mainly composed of Indians, muleteers, and small venders, his abstraction would have been noticed. With ready tact he had not attempted, by further questioning, to break the taciturnity into which Hurlstone had relapsed after his emotional confession and the priest's abrupt half-absolution. Was it possible he regretted his confidence, or was it possible that his first free and untrammeled expression of his wrongs had left him with a haunting doubt of their real magnitude?

"Lie down here, my son," said the old ecclesiastic, pointing to a small pallet in the corner, "and try to restore in the morning what you have taken from the night.

Manuela will bring your clothes when they are dried and mended; meantime, shift for yourself in Pepito's serape and calzas. I will betake me to the comandante and the alcalde, to learn the dispositions of your party, when the ship will sail, and if your absence is suspected. Peace be with you, son! Manuela, attend to the caballero, and see you chatter not."

Without doubting the substantial truth of his guest's story, the good Padre Esteban was not unwilling to have it corroborated by such details as he thought he could collect among the Excelsior's passengers. His own experience in the confessional had taught him the unreliability of human evidence, and the vagaries of both conscientious and unconscious suppression. That a young, good-looking, and accomplished caballero should have been the victim of not one, but even many, erotic episodes, did not strike the holy father as being peculiar; but that he should have been brought by a solitary unfortunate attachment to despair and renunciation of the world appeared to him marvelous. He was not unfamiliar with the remorse of certain gallants for peccadillos with other men's wives; but this Americano's self-abasement for the sins of his own wife — as he foolishly claimed her to be — whom he hated and despised, struck Father Esteban as a miracle open to suspicion. Was there anything else in these somewhat commonplace details of vulgar and low intrigue than what he had told the priest? Were all these Americano husbands as sensitive and as gloomily self-sacrificing and expiating? It did not appear so from the manners and customs of the others, — from those easy matrons whose complacent husbands had abandoned them to the long companionship of youthful cavaliers on adventurous voyages; from those audacious virgins, who had the freedom of married women. Surely, this was not a pious and sensitive race, passionately devoted to their domestic affections! The young stranger must be either deceiving him — or an exception to his countrymen!

And if he was that exception — what then? An idea which had sprung up in Father Esteban's fancy that morning now took possession of it with the tenacity of a growth on fertile virgin soil. The good father had been devoted to the conversion of the heathen with the fervor of a one-ideaed man. But his successes had been among the Indians — a guileless, harmless race, who too often confounded the practical benefits of civilization with the abstract benefits of the Church, and their instruction had been simple and coercive. There had been no necessity for argument or controversy; the worthy priest's skill in polemical warfare and disputation had never been brought into play; the comandante and alcalde were as punctiliously orthodox as himself, and the small traders and artisans were hopelessly docile and submissive. The march of science, which had been stopped by the local fogs of Todos Santos some fifty years, had not disturbed the simple Æsculapius of the province with heterodox theories: he still purged and bled like Sangrado, and met the priest at the deathbed of his victims with a pious satisfaction that had no trace of skeptical contention. In fact, the gentle Mission of Todos Santos had hitherto presented no field for the good father's exalted ambition, nor the display of his powers as a zealot. And here was a splendid opportunity.

The conversion of this dark, impulsive, hysterical stranger would be a gain to the fold, and a triumph worthy of his steel. More than that, if he had judged correctly of this young man's mind and temperament, they seemed to contain those elements of courage and sacrificial devotion that indicated the missionary priesthood. With such a subaltern, what might not he, Father Esteban, accomplish! Looking further into the future, what a glorious successor might be left to his unfinished work on Todos Santos!

Buried in these reflections, Padre Esteban sauntered leisurely up the garden, that gradually ascended the slight

elevation on which the greater part of the pueblo was built. Through a low gateway in the wall he passed on to the crest of the one straggling street of Todos Santos. On either side of him were ranged the low one-storied, deep-windowed adobe fondas and artisans' dwellings, with low-pitched roofs of dull red pipe-like tiles. Absorbed in his fanciful dreams, he did not at first notice that those dwellings appeared deserted, and that even the Posada opposite him, whose courtyard was usually filled with lounging muleteers, was empty and abandoned. Looking down the street towards the plaza, he became presently aware of some undefined stirring in the peaceful hamlet. There was an unusual throng in the square, and afar on that placid surface of the bay from which the fog had lifted, the two or three fishing-boats of Todos Santos were vaguely pulling. But the strange ship was gone.

A feeling of intense relief and satisfaction followed. Father Esteban pulled out his snuff-box and took a long and complacent pinch. But his relief was quickly changed to consternation as an armed cavalcade rapidly wheeled out of the plaza and cantered toward him, with the unmistakable spectacle of the male passengers of the Excelsior riding two and two, and guarded by double files of dragoons on each side.

At a sign from the priest the subaltern reined in his mustang, halted the convoy, and saluted respectfully, to the astonishment of the prisoners. The clerical authority of Todos Santos evidently dominated the military. Renewed hope sprang up in the hearts of the Excelsior party.

"What have we here?" asked Padre Esteban.

"A revolution, your reverence, among the Americanos, with robbery of the Presidio saluting-gun; a grave affair. Your reverence has been sent for by the comandante. I am taking these men to San Antonio to await the decision of the council."

"And the ship?"

"Gone, your reverence. One of the parties has captured it."

"And these?"

"Are the Legitimists, your reverence: at least they have confessed to have warred with Mexico, and invaded California — the brigands."

The priest remained lost for a moment in blank and bitter amazement. Banks took advantage of the pause to edge his way to the front.

"Ask him, some of you," he said, turning to Brace and Crosby, "when this d—d farce will be over, and where we can find the head man — the boss idiot of this foolery."

"Let him put it milder," whispered Winslow. "You have got us into trouble enough with your tongue already."

Crosby hesitated a moment.

"Quand finira ce drôle représentation? — et — et — qui est ce qui est l'entrepreneur?" he said dubiously.

The priest stared. These Americans were surely cooler and less excitable than his strange guest. A thought struck him.

"How many are still in the ship?" he asked gently.

"Nobody but Perkins and that piratical crew of niggers."

"And that infernal Hurlstone," added Winslow.

The priest pricked up his ears.

"Hurlstone?" he repeated.

"Yes — a passenger like ourselves, as we supposed. But we are satisfied now he was in the conspiracy from the beginning," translated Crosby painfully.

"Look at his strange disappearance — a regular put-up job," broke in Brace, in English, without reference to the padre's not comprehending him; "so that he and Perkins could shut themselves up together without suspicion."

"Never mind Hurlstone now; he's *gone*, and we're *here*," said Banks angrily. "Ask the parson, as a gentleman and a Christian, what sort of a hole we've got into, anyhow. How far is the next settlement?"

Crosby put the question. The subaltern lit a cigarette.

"There is no next settlement. The pueblo ends at San Antonio."

"And what's beyond that?"

"The ocean."

"And what's south?"

"The desert — one cannot pass it."

"And north?"

"The desert."

"And east?"

"The desert too."

"Then how do you get away from here?"

"We do not get away."

"And how do you communicate with Mexico — with your government?"

"When a ship comes."

"And when does a ship come?"

"Quien sabe?"

The officer threw away his cigarette.

"I say, you'll tell the commander that all this is illegal; and that I'm going to complain to our government," continued Banks hurriedly.

"I go to speak to the comandante," responded the priest gravely.

"And tell him that if he touches a hair of the ladies' heads we'll have his own scalp," interrupted Brace impetuously.

Even Crosby's diplomatic modification of this speech did not appear entirely successful.

"The Mexican soldier wars not with women," said the priest coldly. "Adieu, messieurs!"

The cavalcade moved on. The Excelsior passengers at once resumed their chorus of complaint, trade, and aggressive suggestion, heedless of the soldiers who rode stolidly on each side.

"To think we have n't got a single revolver among us," said Brace despairingly.

"We might each grab a carbine from these nigger fellows," said Crosby, eying them contemplatively.

"And if they did n't burst, and we were n't shot by the next patrol, and if we 'd calculated to be mean enough to run away from the women — where would we escape to? " asked Banks curtly. "Hold on at least until we get an ultimatum from that commodious ass at the Presidio! Then we 'll anticipate the fool-killer, if you like. My opinion is, they are n't in any great hurry to try *anything* on us just yet."

"And I say, lie low and keep dark until they show their hand," added Winslow, who had no relish for an indiscriminate scrimmage, and had his own ideas of placating their captors.

Nevertheless, by degrees they fell into a silence, partly the effect of the strangely enervating air. The fog had completely risen from the landscape, and hung high in mid-air, through which an intense sun, shorn of its fierceness, diffused a lambent warmth, and a yellowish, unctuous light, as if it had passed through amber. The bay gleamed clearly and distinctly; not a shadow flecked its surface to the gray impenetrable rampart of fog that stretched like a granite wall before its entrance. On one side of the narrow road billows of monstrous grain undulated to the crest of the low hills, that looked like larger undulations of the soil, furrowed by bosky cañadas or shining arroyos. Banks was startled into a burst of professional admiration.

"There 's enough grain there to feed a thousand Todos

Santos; and raised, too, with tools like that," he continued, pointing to a primitive plow that lay on the wayside, formed by a single forked root. A passing ox-cart, whose creaking wheels were made of a solid circle of wood, apparently sawn from an ordinary log, again plunged him into cogitation. Here and there little areas of the rudest cultivation broke into a luxuriousness of orange, lime, and fig trees. The joyous earth at the slightest provocation seemed to smile and dimple with fruit and flowers. Everywhere the rare beatitudes of Todos Santos revealed and repeated its simple story. The fructifying influence of earth and sky; the intervention of a vaporous veil between a fiery sun and fiery soil; the combination of heat and moisture, purified of feverish exhalations, and made sweet and wholesome by the saline breath of the mighty sea, had been the beneficent legacy of their isolation, the munificent compensation of their oblivion.

A gradual and gentle ascent at the end of two hours brought the cavalcade to a halt upon a rugged upland with semi-tropical shrubbery, and here and there larger trees from the tierra templada in the evergreens or madroño. A few low huts and corrals, and a rambling hacienda, were scattered along the crest, and in the midst arose a little votive chapel, flanked by pear-trees. Near the roadside were the crumbling edges of some long-forgotten excavation. Crosby gazed at it curiously. Touching the arm of the officer, he pointed to it.

"Una mina de plata," said the officer sententiously.

"A mine of some kind — silver, I bet!" said Crosby, turning to the others. "Is it good — bueno — you know?" he continued to the officer, with vague gesticulations.

"En tiempos pasados," returned the officer gravely.

"I wonder what that means?" said Winslow.

But before Crosby could question further, the subaltern signaled to them to dismount. They did so, and their

horses were led away to a little declivity, whence came the sound of running water. Left to themselves, the Americans looked around them. The cavalcade seemed to have halted near the edge of a precipitous ridge, the evident termination of the road. But the view that here met their eyes was unexpected and startling.

The plateau on which they stood seemed to drop suddenly away, leaving them on the rocky shore of a monotonous and far-stretching sea of waste and glittering sand. Not a vestige nor trace of vegetation could be seen, except an occasional ridge of straggling pallid bushes, raised in hideous simulation of the broken crest of a ghostly wave. On either side, as far as the eye could reach, the hollow empty vision extended — the interminable desert stretched and panted before them.

"It 's the jumping-off place, I reckon," said Crosby, "and they 've brought us here to show us how small is our chance of getting away. But," he added, turning towards the plateau again, "what are they doing now? 'Pon my soul! I believe they 're going off — and leaving us."

The others turned as he spoke. It was true. The dragoons were coolly galloping off the way they came, taking with them the horses the Americans had just ridden.

"I call that cool," said Crosby. "It looks deuced like as if we were to be left here to graze, like cattle."

"Perhaps that 's their idea of a prison in this country," said Banks. "There 's certainly no chance of our breaking jail in that direction," he added, pointing to the desert; "and we can't follow them without horses."

"And I dare say they 've guarded the pass in the road lower down," said Winslow.

"We ought to be able to hold our own here until night," said Brace, "and then make a dash into Todos Santos, get hold of some arms, and join the ladies."

"The women are all right," said Crosby impatiently,

"and are better treated than if we were with them. Suppose, instead of maundering over them, we reconnoitre and see what *we* can do here. I 'm getting devilishly hungry; they can't mean to starve us, and if they do, I don't intend to be starved as long as there is anything to be had by buying or stealing. Come along. There 's sure to be fruit near that old chapel, and I saw some chickens in the bush near those huts. First, let 's see if there 's any one about. I don't see a soul."

The little plateau, indeed, seemed deserted. In vain they shouted; their voices were lost in the echoless air. They examined one by one the few thatched huts: they were open, contained one or two rude articles of furniture — a bed, a bench, and table — were scrupulously clean — and empty. They next inspected the chapel; it was tawdry and barbaric in ornament, but the candlesticks and crucifix and the basin for holy water were of heavily beaten silver. The same thought crossed their minds — the abandoned mine at the roadside!

Bananas, oranges, and prickly-pears growing within the cactus-hedge of the chapel partly mollified their thirst and hunger, and they turned their steps towards the long, rambling, barrack-looking building, with its low windows and red-tiled roof, which they had first noticed. Here, too, the tenement was deserted and abandoned; but there was evidence of some previous and more ambitious preparation: in a long dormitory off the corridor a number of scrupulously clean beds were ranged against the white-washed walls, with spotless benches and tables. To the complete astonishment and bewilderment of the party another room, fitted up as a kitchen, with the simpler appliances of housekeeping, revealed a larder filled with provisions and meal. A shout from Winslow, who had penetrated the inner courtyard, however, drew them to a more remarkable spectacle. Their luggage and effects from

the cabins of the Excelsior were there, carefully piled in the antique ox-cart that had evidently that morning brought them from Todos Santos !

"There 's no mistake," said Brace, with a relieved look, after a hurried survey of the trunks. "They have only brought our baggage. The ladies have evidently had the opportunity of selecting their own things."

"Crosby told you they 'd be all right," said Banks; "and as for ourselves, I don't see why we can't be pretty comfortable here, and all the better for our being alone. I shall take an opportunity of looking around a bit. It strikes me that there are some resources in this country that might pay to develop."

"And I shall have a look at that played-out mine," said Crosby; "if it 's been worked as they work the land, they 've left about as much in it as they 've taken out."

"That 's all well enough," said Brace, drawing a dull vermilion-colored stone from his pocket; "but here 's something I picked up just now that ain't 'played out,' nor even the value of it suspected by those fellows. That 's cinnabar — quicksilver ore — and a big per cent. of it too; and if there 's as much of it here as the indications show, you could buy up all your *silver* mines in the country with it."

"If I were you, I 'd put up a notice on a post somewhere, as they do in California, and claim discovery," said Banks seriously. "There 's no knowing how this thing may end. We may not get away from here for some time yet, and if the government will sell the place cheap, it would n't be a bad spec' to buy it. Form a kind of 'Excelsior Company' among ourselves, you know, and go shares."

The four men looked earnestly at each other. Already the lost Excelsior and her mutinous crew were forgotten; even the incidents of the morning — their arrest, the uncertainty

of their fate, and the fact that they were in the hands of a hostile community — appeared but as trivial preliminaries to the new life that opened before them! They suddenly became graver than they had ever been — even in the moment of peril.

"I don't see why we should n't," said Brace quickly. "We started out to do that sort of thing in California, and I reckon if we 'd found such a spot as this on the Sacramento or American River we 'd have been content. We can take turns at housekeeping, prospect a little, and enter into negotiations with the government. I 'm for offering them a fair sum for this ridge and all it contains at once."

"The only thing against that," said Crosby slowly, "is the probability that it is already devoted to some other use by the government. Ever since we 've been here I 've been thinking — I don't know why — that we 've been put in a sort of quarantine. The desertion of the place, the half hospital arrangements of this building, and the means they have taken to isolate us from themselves, must mean something. I 've read somewhere that in these out-of-the-way spots in the tropics they have a place where they put the fellows with malarious or contagious diseases. I don't want to frighten you boys: but I 've an idea that we 're in a sort of lazaretto, and the people outside won't trouble us often."

CHAPTER X

TODOS SANTOS SOLVES THE MYSTERY

NOTWITHSTANDING his promise, and the summons of the council, Father Esteban, on parting with the Excelsior prisoners in the San Antonio road, did not proceed immediately to the presence of the comandante. Partly anxious to inform himself more thoroughly regarding Hurlstone's antecedents before entering upon legislative functions that might concern him, partly uneasy at Brace's allusion to any possible ungentleness in the treatment of the fair Americanas, and partly apprehensive that Mrs. Brimmer might seek him at the Mission in the present emergency, the good father turned his steps towards the alcalde's house.

Mrs. Brimmer, in a becoming morning wrapper, half reclining in an Indian hammock in the corridor, supported by Miss Chubb, started at his approach. So did the young alcalde, sympathetically seated at her side. Padre Esteban for an instant was himself embarrassed. Mrs. Brimmer quickly recovered her usual bewildering naïveté.

"I knew you would come; but if you had n't, I should have mustered courage enough to go with Miss Chubb to find you at the Mission," she said, half coquettishly. "Not but that Don Ramon has been all kindness and consideration, but you know one always clings to one's spiritual adviser in such an emergency; and although there are differences of opinion between us, I think I may speak to you as freely as I would speak to my dear friend Dr. Potts, of Trinity Chapel. Of course you don't know *him;* but

you could n't have helped liking him, he 's so gentle, so tactful, so refined! But do tell me the fullest particulars of this terrible calamity that has happened so awkwardly. Tell me all! I fear that Don Ramon, out of kindness, has not told me everything. *I* have been perfectly frank, *I* told him everything — who I am, who Mr. Brimmer is, and given him even the connections of my friend Miss Chubb. I can do no more; but you will surely have no difficulty in finding some one in Todos Santos who has heard of the Quincys and Brimmers. I 've no doubt that there are books in your library that mention them. Of course I can say nothing of the other passengers, except that Mr. Brimmer would not have probably permitted me to associate with any notorious persons. I confess now — I think I told you once before, Clarissa — that I greatly doubted Captain Bunker's ability" —

"Ah," murmured Don Ramon.

— "To make a social selection," continued Mrs. Brimmer. "He may have been a good sailor, and boxed his compass, but he lacked a knowledge of the world. Of the other passengers I can truly say I know nothing; I cannot think that Mr. Crosby's sense of humor led him into bad associations, or that he ever went beyond verbal impropriety. Certainly nothing in Miss Keene's character has led me to believe she could so far forget what was due to herself and to us as to address a lawless mob in the streets as she did just now; although her friend Mrs. Markham, as I just told Don Ramon, is an advocate of Women's Rights and Female Suffrage, and I believe she contemplates addressing the public from the lecturer's platform."

"It is n't possible!" interrupted Don Ramon excitedly, in mingled horror of the masculinely rampant Mrs. Markham and admiration of the fascinatingly feminine Mrs. Brimmer; "a lady cannot be an orator — a haranguer of men!"

"Not in society," responded Mrs. Brimmer with a sigh, "and I do not remember to have met the lady before. The fact is, she does not move in our circle — in the upper classes."

The alcalde exchanged a glance with the padre.

"Ah! you have classes? and she is of a distinct class, perhaps?"

"Decidedly," said Mrs. Brimmer promptly.

"Pardon me," said Padre Esteban, with gentle persuasiveness, "but you are speaking of your fellow passengers. Know you not, then, of one Hurlstone, who is believed to be still in the ship Excelsior, and perhaps of the party who seized it?"

"Mr. Hurlstone? — it is possible; but I know really nothing of him," said Mrs. Brimmer carelessly. "I don't think Clarissa did, either — did you, dear? Even in our enforced companionship we had to use some reserve, and we may have drawn the line at him! He was a friend of Miss Keene's; indeed, she was the only one who seemed to know him."

"And she is now here?" asked the padre eagerly.

"No. She is with her friend the Señora Markham, at the Presidio. The comandante has given her the disposition of his house," said Don Ramon, with a glance of grave archness at Mrs. Brimmer; "it is not known which is the most favored, the eloquent orator or the beautiful and daring leader!"

"Mrs. Markham is a married woman," said Mrs. Brimmer severely, "and, of course, she can do as she pleases; but it is far different with Miss Keene. *I* should scarcely consider it proper to expose Miss Chubb to the hospitality of a single man, without other women, and I cannot understand how she could leave the companionship and protection of your lovely sisters."

The priest here rose, and, with formal politeness, ex-

cused himself, urging the peremptory summons of the Council.

"I scarcely expected, indeed, to have had the pleasure of seeing my colleague here," he added with quiet suavity, turning to the alcalde.

"I have already expressed my views to the comandante," said the official, with some embarrassment, "and my attendance will hardly be required."

The occasional misleading phosphorescence of Mrs. Brimmer's quiet eyes, early alluded to in these pages, did not escape Father Esteban's quick perception at that moment; however, he preferred to leave his companion to follow its aberrations rather than to permit that *ignis fatuus* to light him on his way by it.

"But my visit to you, Father Esteban," she began sweetly, "is only postponed."

"Until I have the pleasure of anticipating it here," said the priest, with paternal politeness bending before the two ladies; "but for the present, au revoir!"

"It would be an easy victory to win this discreetly emotional Americana to the Church," said Father Esteban to himself as he crossed the plaza; "but, if I mistake not, she would not cease to be a disturbing element even there. However, she is not such as would give this Hurlstone any trouble. It seems I must look elsewhere for the brains of this party, and to find a solution of this young man's mystery; and, if I judge correctly, it is with this beautiful young agitator of revolutions and her oratorical duenna I must deal."

He entered the low gateway of the Presidio unchallenged, and even traversed the courtyard without meeting a soul. The guard and sentries had evidently withdrawn to their habitual vocations, and the former mediæval repose of the venerable building had returned. There was no one in the guard-room; but as the priest turned back to the corridor,

his quick ear was suddenly startled by the unhallowed and inconsistent sounds of a guitar. A monotonous voice also — the comandante's evidently — was raised in a thin, high recitative.

The padre passed hastily through the guard-room, and opened the door of the passage leading to the garden slope. Here an extraordinary group presented itself to his astonished eyes. In the shadow of a palm-tree, Mrs. Markham, seated on her Saratoga trunk as on a throne, was gazing blandly down upon the earnest features of the commander, who, at her feet, guitar in hand, was evidently repeating some musical composition. His subaltern sat near him, divided in admiration of his chief and the guest. Miss Keene, at a little distance, aided by the secretary, was holding an animated conversation with a short, stout, Sancho-Panza-looking man, whom the padre recognized as the doctor of Todos Santos.

At the apparition of the reverend father, the commander started, the subaltern stared, and even the secretary and the doctor looked discomposed.

"I am decidedly *de trop* this morning," soliloquized the ecclesiastic; but Miss Keene cut short his reflection by running to him frankly, with outstretched hand.

"I am so glad that you have come," she said, with a youthful, unrestrained earnestness that was as convincing as it was fascinating, "for you will help me to persuade this gentleman that poor Captain Bunker is suffering more from excitement of mind than body, and that bleeding him is more than folly."

"The man's veins are in a burning fever and delirium from aguardiente," said the little doctor excitedly, "and the fire must first be put out by the lancet."

"He is only crazy with remorse for having lost his ship through his own carelessness and the treachery of others," said Miss Keene doughtily.

"He is a maniac and will kill himself, unless his fever is subdued," persisted the doctor.

"And you would surely kill him by your way of subduing it," said the young girl boldly. "Better for him, a disgraced man of honor, to die by his own hand, than to be bled like a calf into a feeble and helpless dissolution. I would, if I were in his place — if I had to do it by tearing off the bandages."

She made a swift, half unconscious gesture of her little hand, and stopped, her beautiful eyes sparkling, her thin pink nostrils dilated, her red lips parted, her round throat lifted in the air, and one small foot advanced before her. The men glanced hurriedly at each other, and then fixed their eyes upon her with a rapt yet frightened admiration. To their simple minds it was Anarchy and Revolution personified, beautiful, and victorious.

"Ah!" said the secretary to Padre Esteban, in Spanish, "it is true! she knows not fear! She was in the room alone with the madman; he would let none approach but her! She took a knife from him — else the medico had suffered!"

"He recognized her, you see! Ah! they know her power," said the comandante, joining the group.

"You will help me, Father Esteban?" said the young girl, letting the fire of her dark eyes soften to a look of almost childish appeal — "you will help me to intercede for him? It is the restraint only that is killing him — that is goading him to madness! Think of him, Father — think of him: ruined and disgraced, dying to retrieve himself by any reckless action, any desperate chance of recovery, and yet locked up where he can do nothing, — attempt nothing — not even lift a hand to pursue the man who has helped to bring him to this!"

"But he *can* do nothing! The ship is gone!" remonstrated the comandante.

"Yes, the ship is gone; but the ocean is still there," said Miss Keene.

"But he has no boat."

"He will find or make one."

"And the fog conceals the channel."

"He can go where *they* have gone, or meet their fate. You do not know my countrymen, señor comandante," she said proudly.

"Ah, yes — pardon! They are at San Antonio — the baker, the buffoon, the two young men who dig. They are already baking and digging and joking. We have it from my officer, who has just returned."

Miss Keene bit her pretty lips.

"They think it is a mistake; they cannot believe that any intentional indignity is offered them," she said quietly. "Perhaps it is well they do not."

"They desire me to express their condolences to the señora," said the padre, with exasperating gentleness, "and were relieved to be assured by me of your perfect security in the hands of these gentlemen."

Miss Keene raised her clear eyes to the ecclesiastic. That accomplished diplomat of Todos Santos absolutely felt confused under the cool scrutiny of this girl's unbiased and unsophisticated intelligence.

"Then you *have* seen them," she said, "and you know their innocence, and the utter absurdity of this surveillance?"

"I have not seen them *all*," said the priest softly. "There is still another — a Señor Hurlstone — who is missing? Is he not?"

It was not in the possibility of Eleanor Keene's truthful blood to do other than respond with a slight color to this question. She had already concealed from every one the fact of having seen the missing man in the Mission garden the evening before. It did not, however, prevent her the

next moment from calmly meeting the glance of the priest as she answered gravely: —

"I believe so. But I cannot see what that has to do with the detention of the others."

"Much, perhaps. It has been said that you alone, my child, were in the confidence of this man."

"Who dared say that?" exclaimed Miss Keene in English, forgetting herself in her indignation.

"If it's anything mean — it's Mrs. Brimmer, I'll bet a cooky," said Mrs. Markham, whose linguistic deficiencies had debarred her from the previous conversation.

"You have only," continued the priest, without noticing the interruption, "to tell us what you know of this Hurlstone's plans, — of his complicity with Señor Perkins, or," he added significantly, "his opposition to them — to insure that perfect justice shall be done to all."

Relieved that the question involved no disclosure of her only secret regarding Hurlstone, Miss Keene was about to repeat the truth that she had no confidential knowledge of him, or of his absurd alleged connection with Señor Perkins, when, with an instinct of tact, she hesitated. Might she not serve them all — even Hurlstone himself — by saying nothing, and leaving the burden of proof to their idiotic accusers? Was she altogether sure that Hurlstone was entirely ignorant of Señor Perkins's plans, or might he not have refused, at the last moment, to join in the conspiracy, and so left the ship?

"I will not press you for your answer now," said the priest gently. "But you will not, I know, keep back anything that may throw a light on this sad affair, and perhaps help to reinstate your friend Mr. Hurlstone in his *real* position."

"If you ask me if I believe that Mr. Hurlstone had anything to do with this conspiracy, I should say, unhesitatingly, that I do *not*. And more, I believe that he

would have jumped overboard rather than assent to so infamous an act," said the young girl boldly.

"Then you think he had no other motive for leaving the ship?" said the priest slowly.

"Decidedly not." She stopped; a curious anxious look in the padre's persistent eyes both annoyed and frightened her. "What other motive could he have?" she said coldly.

Father Esteban's face lightened.

"I only ask because I think you would have known it. Thank you for the assurance all the same, and in return I promise you I will use my best endeavors with the comandante for your friend the Captain Bunker. Adieu, my daughter. Adieu, Madame Markham," he said, as, taking the arm of Don Miguel, he turned with him and the doctor towards the guard-room. The secretary lingered behind for a moment.

"Fear nothing," he said, in whispered English to Miss Keene. "I, Ruy Sanchez, shall make you free of Capitano Bunker's cell," and passed on.

"Well," said Mrs. Markham, when the two women were alone again. "I don't pretend to fathom the befogged brains of Todos Santos; but as far as I can understand their grown-up child's play, they are making believe this unfortunate Mr. Hurlstone, who may be dead for all we know, is in revolt against the United States Government, which is supposed to be represented by Señor Perkins and the Excelsior — think of that!"

"But Perkins signed himself of the Quinquinambo navy!" said Miss Keene wonderingly.

"That is firmly believed by those idiots to be one of *our* States. Remember they know nothing of what has happened anywhere in the last fifty years. I dare say they never heard of filibusters like Perkins, and they could n't comprehend him if they had. I 've given up

trying to enlighten them, and I think they 're grateful for it. It makes their poor dear heads ache."

"And it is turning mine! But, for Heaven's sake, tell me what part I am supposed to act in this farce!" said Miss Keene.

"You are the friend and colleague of Hurlstone, don't you see?" said Mrs. Markham. "You are two beautiful young patriots — don't blush, my dear! — endeared to each other and a common cause, and ready to die for your country in opposition to Perkins, and the faint-heartedness of such neutrals as Mrs. Brimmer, Miss Chubb, the poor captain, and all the men whom they have packed off to San Antonio."

"Impossible!" said Miss Keene, yet with an uneasy feeling that it not only was possible, but that she herself had contributed something to the delusion. "But how do they account for my friendship with *you* — you, who are supposed to be a correspondent — an accomplice of Perkins?"

"No, no," returned Mrs. Markham, with a half serious smile, "*I* am not allowed that honor. *I* am presumed to be only the disconsolate Dulcinea of Perkins, abandoned by *him*, pitied by you, and converted to the true faith — at least, that is what I make out from the broken English of that little secretary of the commander."

Miss Keene winced.

"That 's all my fault, dear," she said, suddenly entwining her arms round Mrs. Markham, and hiding her half embarrassed smile on the shoulder of her strong-minded friend; "they suggested it to me, and I half assented, to save you. Please forgive me."

"Don't think I am blaming you, my dear Eleanor," said Mrs. Markham. "For Heaven's sake assent to the wildest and most extravagant hypothesis they can offer, if it will leave us free to arrange our own plans for getting away. I

begin to think we were not a very harmonious party on the Excelsior, and most of our troubles here are owing to that. We forget we have fallen among a lot of original saints, as guileless and as unsophisticated as our first parents, who know nothing of our customs and antecedents. They have accepted us on what they believe to be our own showing. From first to last we 've underrated them, forgetting they are in the majority. We can't expect to correct the ignorance of fifty years in twenty-four hours, and I, for one, sha'n't attempt it. I 'd much rather trust to the character those people would conceive of me from their own consciousness than to one Mrs. Brimmer or Mr. Winslow would give of me. From this moment I 've taken a firm resolve to leave my reputation and the reputation of my friends entirely in their hands. If you are wise you will do the same. They are inclined to worship you — don't hinder them. My belief is, if we only take things quietly, we might find worse places to be stranded on than Todos Santos. If Mrs. Brimmer and those men of ours, who, I dare say, have acted as silly as the Mexicans themselves, will only be quiet, we can have our own way here yet."

"And poor Captain Bunker?" said Miss Keene.

"It seems hard to say it, but, in my opinion, he is better under lock and key, for everybody's good, at present. He 'd be a firebrand in the town if he got away. Meantime, let us go to our room. It is about the time when everybody is taking a siesta, and for two hours, thank Heaven! we 're certain nothing more can happen."

"I 'll join you in a moment," said Miss Keene.

Her quick ear had caught the sound of voices approaching. As Mrs. Markham disappeared in the passage, the commander and his party reappeared from the guard-room, taking leave of Padre Esteban. The secretary, as he passed Miss Keene, managed to add to his formal salutation the

whispered words, "When the Angelus rings I will await you before the grating of his prison."

Padre Esteban was too preoccupied to observe this incident. As soon as he quitted the Presidio, he hastened to the Mission with a disquieting fear that his strange guest might have vanished. But, crossing the silent refectory, and opening the door of the little apartment, he was relieved to find him stretched on the pallet in a profound slumber. The peacefulness of the venerable walls had laid a gentle finger on his weary eyelids.

The padre glanced round the little cell, and back again at the handsome suffering face that seemed to have found surcease and rest in the narrow walls, with a stirring of regret. But the next moment he awakened the sleeper, and in the briefest, almost frigid, sentences, related the events of the morning.

The young man rose to his feet with a bitter laugh.

"You see," he said, "God is against me! And yet a few hours ago I dared to think that He had guided me to a haven of rest and forgetfulness!"

"Have you told the truth to Him and to me?" said the priest sternly, "or have you — a mere political refugee — taken advantage of an old man's weakness to forge a foolish lie of sentimental passion?"

"What do you mean?" said Hurlstone, turning upon him almost fiercely.

The priest rose, and drawing a folded paper from his bosom, opened it before the eyes of his indignant guest.

"Remember what you told me last night in the sacred confidences of yonder holy church, and hear what you really are from the lips of the Council of Todos Santos."

Smoothing out the paper, he read slowly as follows: —

Whereas, it being presented to an Emergency Council, held at the Presidio of Todos Santos, that the foreign barque

Excelsior had mutinied, discharged her captain and passengers, and escaped from the waters of the bay, it was, on examination, found and decreed that the said barque was a vessel primarily owned by a foreign Power, then and there confessed and admitted to be at war with Mexico and equipped to invade one of her northern provinces. But that the God of Liberty and Justice awakening in the breasts of certain patriots — to wit, the heroic Señor Diego Hurlstone and the invincible Doña Leonor — the courage and discretion to resist the tyranny and injustice of their oppressors, caused them to mutiny and abandon the vessel rather than become accomplices in the company of certain neutral and non-combatant traders and artisans, severally known as Brace, Banks, Winslow, and Crosby; and certain aristocrats, known as Señoras Brimmer and Chubb. In consideration thereof, it is decreed by the Council of Todos Santos that asylum, refuge, hospitality, protection, amity, and alliance be offered and extended to the patriots, Señor Diego Hurlstone, Doña Leonor, and a certain Duenna Susana Markham, particularly attached to Doña Leonor's person; and that war, reprisal, banishment, and death be declared against Señor Perkins, his unknown aiders and abettors. And that for the purposes of probation, and in the interests of clemency, provisional parole shall be extended to the alleged neutrals — Brace, Banks, Crosby, and Winslow — within the limits and boundaries of the lazaretto of San Antonio, until their neutrality shall be established, and pending the further pleasure of the Council. And it is further decreed and declared that one Capitano Bunker, — formerly of the Excelsior, but now a maniac and lunatic, — being irresponsible and visited of God, shall be exempted from the ordinances of this decree until his reason shall be restored; and during that interval subjected to the ordinary remedial and beneficent re-

straint of civilization and humanity. By order of the Council, —

The signatures and rubrics of —

Don Miguel Briones,
Comandante.

Padre Esteban,
of the Order of San Francisco d'Assisis.

Don Ramon Ramirez,
Alcalde of the Pueblo of Todos Santos.

CHAPTER XI

THE CAPTAIN FOLLOWS HIS SHIP

When Padre Esteban had finished reading the document he laid it down and fixed his eyes on the young man. Hurlstone met his look with a glance of impatient disdain.

"What have you to say to this?" asked the ecclesiastic, a little impressed by his manner.

"That as far as it concerns myself it is a farrago of absurdity. If I were the person described there, why should I have sought you with what you call a lie of 'sentimental passion,' when I could have claimed protection openly with my *sister patriot?*" he added, with a bitter laugh.

"Because you did not know *then* the sympathy of the people nor the decision of the council," said the priest.

"But I know it *now*, and I refuse to accept it."

"You refuse — to — to accept it?" echoed the priest.

"I do." He walked towards the door. "Before I go, let me thank you for the few hours' rest and security that you have given to one who may be a cursed man, yet is no impostor. But I do not blame you for doubting one who talks like a desperate man, yet lacks the courage of desperation. Good-by!"

"Where are you going?"

"What matters? There is a safer protection and security to be found than even that offered by the Council of Todos Santos."

His eyes were averted, but not before the priest had seen

them glaze again with the same gloomy absorption that had horrified him in the church the evening before. Father Esteban stepped forward and placed his soft hand on Hurlstone's shoulder.

"Look at me. Don't turn your face aside, but hear me; for I believe your story."

Without raising his eyes, the young man lifted Father Esteban's hand from his shoulder, pressed it lightly, and put it quietly aside.

"I thank you," he said, "for keeping at least that unstained memory of me. But it matters little now. Good-by!"

He had his hand upon the door, but the priest again withheld him.

"When I tell you I believe your story, it is only to tell you more. I believe that God has directed your wayward, wandering feet here to His house, that you may lay down the burden of your weak and suffering manhood before His altar, and become once more a child of His. I stand here to offer you, not a refuge of a day or a night, but for all time; not a hiding-place from man or woman, but from yourself, my son — yourself, your weak and mortal self, more fatal to you than all. I stand here to open for you not only the door of this humble cell, but that of His yonder blessed mansion. You shall share my life with me; you shall be one of my disciples; you shall help me strive for other souls as I have striven for yours; the protection of the Church, which is all-powerful, shall be around you if you wish to be known; you shall hide yourself in its mysteries if you wish to be forgotten. You shall be my child, my companion, my friend; all that my age can give you shall be yours while I live, and it shall be your place one day to take up my unfinished work when it falls from these palsied hands forever."

"You are mistaken," said the young man coldly. "I

came to you for human aid, and thank you for what you have granted me: I have not been presumptuous enough to ask more, nor to believe myself a fitting subject for conversion. I am weak, but not weak enough to take advantage of the mistaken kindness of either the temporal Council of Todos Santos or its spiritual head." He opened the door leading into the garden. "Forget and forgive me, Father Esteban, and let me say farewell."

"Stop!" said the ecclesiastic, raising himself to his full height and stepping before Hurlstone. "Then if you will not hear me in the name of your Father who lives, in the name of your father who is dead I command you to stay! I stand here to-day in the place of that man I never knew — to hold back his son from madness and crime. Think of me as of him whom you loved, and grant to an old man who might have had a son as old as you the right of throwing a father's protecting arm around you."

There was a moment's silence.

"What do you want me to do?" said Hurlstone, suddenly lifting his now moist and glistening eyes upon the old man.

"Give me your word of honor that for twenty-four hours you will remain as you are — pledging yourself to nothing — only promising to commit no act, take no step, without consulting me. You will not be sought here, nor yet need you keep yourself a prisoner in these gloomy walls — except that, by exposing yourself to the people now, you might be compromised to some course that you are not ready to take."

"I promise," said Hurlstone.

He turned and held out both his hands; but Father Esteban anticipated him with a paternal gesture of uplifted and opened arms, and for an instant the young man's forehead was bowed on the priest's shoulder.

Father Esteban gently raised the young man's head.

"You will take a *pasear* in the garden until the Ange-

lus rings, my son, while the air is sweet and wholesome, and think this over. Remember that you may accept the hospitality of the council without sin of deception. You were not in sympathy with either the captors of the Excelsior or their defeated party; for you would have flown from both. You, of all your party now in Todos Santos, are most in sympathy with us. You have no cause to love your own people; you have abandoned them for us. Go, my son; and meditate upon my words. I will fetch you from yonder slope in time for the evening refection."

Hurlstone bowed his head and turned his irresolute feet towards the upper extremity of the garden, indicated by the priest, which seemed to offer more seclusion and security than the avenue of pear-trees. He was dazed and benumbed. The old dogged impulses of self-destruction — revived by the priest's reproaches, but checked by the vision of his dead and forgotten father, which the priest's words had called up — gave way, in turn, to his former despair. With it came a craving for peace and rest so insidious that in some vague fear of yielding to it he quickened his pace, as if to increase his distance from the church and its apostle. He was almost out of breath when he reached the summit, and turned to look back upon the Mission buildings and the straggling street of the pueblo, which now for the first time he saw skirted the wall of the garden in its descent towards the sea. He had not known the full extent of Todos Santos before; when he swam ashore he had landed under a crumbling outwork of the fort; he gazed now with curious interest over the hamlet that might have been his home. He looked over the red-tiled roofs, and further on to the shining bay, shut in by the impenetrable rampart of fog. He might have found rest and oblivion here but for the intrusion of those fellow passengers to share his exile and make it intolerable. How he hated and loathed them all! Yet the next moment he found himself scrutinizing

the street and plaza below him for a glimpse of his countrywomen, whom he knew were still in the town, or vainly endeavoring to locate their habitation among the red-tiled roofs. And that frank, clear-eyed girl — Miss Keene! — she who had seemed to vaguely pity him — she was somewhere here too — selected by the irony of fate to be his confederate! He could not help thinking of her beauty and kindness now, with a vague curiosity that was half an uneasiness. It had not struck him before, but if he were to accept the ridiculous attitude forced upon him by Todos Santos, its absurdity, as well as its responsibility, would become less odious by sharing it with another. Perhaps it might be to *her* advantage — and if so, would he be justified in exposing its absurdity? He would have to see her first — and if he did, how would he explain his real position? A returning wave of bitterness threw him back into his old despair.

The twilight had slowly gathered over the view as he gazed — or rather a luminous concentration above the pueblo and bay had left the outer circle of fog denser and darker. Emboldened by the apparent desertion of the Embarcadero, he began to retrace his steps down the slope, keeping close to the wall so as to avoid passing before the church again, or a closer contact with the gardener among the vines. In this way he reached the path he had skirted the night before, and stopped almost under the shadow of the alcalde's house. It was here he had rested and hidden, — here he had tasted the first sweets of isolation and oblivion in the dreamy garden, — here he had looked forward to peace with the passing of the ship, — and now? The sound of voices and laughter suddenly grated upon his ear. He had heard those voices before. Their distinctness startled him until he became aware that he was standing before a broken, half-rotting door that permitted a glimpse of the neighboring house. He glided quickly past it without

pausing, but in that glimpse beheld Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb half reclining in the corridor — in the attitude he had often seen them on the deck of the ship — talking and laughing with a group of Mexican gallants. A feeling of inconceivable loathing and aversion took possession of him. Was it to *this* he was returning after his despairing search for oblivion? Their empty, idle laughter seemed to ring mockingly in his ears as he hurried on, scarce knowing whither, until he paused before the broken cactus hedge and crumbling wall that faced the Embarcadero. A glance over the hedge showed him that the strip of beach was deserted. He looked up the narrow street; it was empty. A few rapid strides across it gained him the shadow of the sea-wall of the Presidio, unchecked and unhindered. The ebbing tide had left a foot or two of narrow shingle between the sea and the wall. He crept along this until, a hundred yards distant, the sea-wall reëntered inland around a bastion at the entrance of a moat half filled at high tide by the waters of the bay, but now a ditch of shallow pools, sand, and débris. He leaned against the bastion and looked over the softly darkening water.

How quiet it looked, and, under that vaporous veil, how profound and inscrutable! How easy to slip into its all-embracing arms, and sink into its yielding bosom, leaving behind no stain, trace, or record! A surer oblivion than the Church, which could not absolve memory, grant forgetfulness, nor even hide the ghastly footprints of its occupants. Here was obliteration. But was he sure of that? He thought of the body of the murdered Peruvian, laid out at the feet of the council by this same fickle and uncertain sea; he thought of his own distorted face subjected to the cold curiosity of these aliens or the contemptuous pity of his countrymen. But that could be avoided. It was easy for him — a good swimmer — to reach a point far enough out in the channel for the ebbing tides to carry him past that

barrier of fog into the open and obliterating ocean. And then, at least, it might seem as if he had attempted to *escape* — indeed, if he cared, he might be able to keep afloat until he was picked up by some passing vessel, bound to a distant land! The self-delusion pleased him, and seemed to add the clinching argument to his resolution. It was not suicide; it was escape — certainly no more than escape — he intended! And this miserable sophism of self-apology, the last flashes of expiring conscience, helped to light up his pale, determined face with satisfaction. He began coolly to divest himself of his coat.

What was that? — the sound of some dislodged stones splashing in one of the pools further up! He glanced hurriedly round the wall of the bastion. A figure crouching against the side of the ditch, as if concealing itself from observation on the glacis above, was slowly approaching the sea. Suddenly, when within a hundred yards of Hurlstone, it turned, crossed the ditch, rapidly mounted its crumbling sides, and disappeared over the crest. But in that hurried glimpse he had recognized Captain Bunker.

The sudden and mysterious apparition of this man produced on Hurlstone an effect that the most violent opposition could not have created. Without a thought of the terrible purpose it had interrupted, and obeying some stronger instinct that had seized him, he dashed down into the ditch and up to the crest again after Captain Bunker. But he had completely disappeared. A little lagoon, making in from the bay, on which a small fishing-boat was riding, and a solitary fisherman mending his nets on the muddy shore a few feet from it, were all that was to be seen.

He was turning back, when he saw the object of his search creeping from some reeds, on all fours, with a stealthy, panther-like movement towards the unconscious fisherman. Before Hurlstone could utter a cry, Bunker

had sprung upon the unfortunate man, thrown him to the earth, rapidly rolled him over and over, enwrapping him hand and foot in his own net, and involving him hopelessly in its meshes. Tossing the helpless victim — who was apparently too stupefied to call out — to one side, he was rushing towards the boat when, with a single bound, Hurlstone reached his side and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Captain Bunker, for God's sake! what are you doing?"

Captain Bunker turned slowly and without apparent concern towards his captor. Hurlstone fell back before the vacant, lack-lustre eyes that were fixed upon him.

"Captain Bunker 's my name," said the madman, in a whisper. "Lemuel Bunker, of Nantucket! Hush! don't waken him," pointing to the prostrate fisherman; "I 've put him to sleep. I 'm Captain Bunker — old drunken Bunker — who stole one ship from her owners, and disgraced himself, and now is going to steal another — ha, ha! Let me go."

"Captain Bunker," said Hurlstone, recovering himself in time to prevent the maniac from dashing into the water. "Look at me. Don't you know me?"

"Yes, yes; you 're one of old Bunker's dogs kicked overboard by Perkins. I 'm one of Perkins's dogs gone mad, and locked up by Perkins! Ha, ha! But I got out! Hush! *She* let me out. *She* thought I was going to see the boys at San Antonio. But I 'm going off to see the old barque out there in the fog. I 'm going to chuck Perkins overboard and the two mates. Let me go."

He struggled violently. Hurlstone, fearful of quitting his hold to release the fisherman, whom Captain Bunker no longer noticed, and not daring to increase the captain's fury by openly calling to him, beckoned the pinioned man

to make an effort. But, paralyzed by fear, the wretched captive remained immovable, staring at the struggling men. With the strength of desperation Hurlstone at last forced the captain down upon his knees.

"Listen, captain! We 'll go together — you understand. I 'll help you — but we must get a larger boat first — you know."

"But they won't give it," said Captain Bunker mysteriously. "Did n't you hear the council — the owners — the underwriters — say: 'He lost his ship, he 's ruined and disgraced for rum, all for rum!' And we want rum, you know, and it 's all over there in the Excelsior's locker!"

"Yes, yes," said Hurlstone soothingly; "but there 's more in the bigger boat. Come with me. We 'll let the man loose, and we 'll make him show us his bigger boat."

It was an unfortunate suggestion; for the captain, who had listened with an insane chuckle, and allowed himself to be taken lightly by the hand, again caught sight of the prostrate fisherman. A yell broke from him — his former frenzy returned. With a cry of "Treachery! all hands on deck!" he threw off Hurlstone and rushed into the water.

"Help!" cried the young man, springing after him. "It is madness. He will kill himself!"

The water was shallow, they were both wading, they both reached the boat at the same time; but the captain had scrambled into the stern-sheets, and cast loose the painter, as Hurlstone once more threw his arms about him.

"Hear me, captain. I 'll go with you. Listen! I know the way through the fog. You understand: I 'll pilot you!" He was desperate, but no longer from despair of himself, but of another; he was reckless, but only

to save a madman from the fate that but a moment before he had chosen for himself.

Captain Bunker seemed to soften. "Get in for'ard," he said, in a lower voice. Hurlstone released his grasp, but still clinging to the boat, which had now drifted into deeper water, made his way to the bow. He was climbing over the thwarts when a horrified cry from the fisherman ashore and a jarring laugh in his ear caused him to look up. But not in time to save himself! The treacherous maniac had suddenly launched a blow from an oar at the unsuspecting man as he was rising to his knees. It missed his head, but fell upon his arm and shoulder, precipitating him violently into the sea.

Stunned by the shock, he sank at first like lead to the bottom. When he rose again, with his returning consciousness, he could see that Captain Bunker had already hoisted sail, and, with the assistance of his oars, was rapidly increasing his distance from the shore. With his returning desperation he turned to strike out after him, but groaned as his one arm sank powerless to his side. A few strokes showed him the madness of the attempt; a few more convinced him that he himself could barely return to the shore. A sudden torpor had taken possession of him — he was sinking!

With this thought, a struggle for life began; and this man who had just now sought death so eagerly — with no feeling of inconsistency, with no physical fear of dissolution, with only a vague, blind, dogged determination to live for some unknown purpose — a determination as vague and dogged as his former ideas of self-destruction — summoned all his energies to reach the shore. He struck out wildly, desperately; once or twice he thought he felt his feet touch the bottom, only to find himself powerlessly dragged back towards the sea. With a final superhuman effort he gained at last a foothold on the muddy strand, and, half scrambling,

half crawling, sank exhaustedly beside the fisherman's net. But the fisherman was gone! He attempted again to rise to his feet, but a strange dizziness attacked him. The darkening landscape, with its contracting wall of fog; the gloomy flat; the still, pale sea, as yet unruffled by the faint land breeze that was slowly wafting the escaping boat into the shadowy offing — all swam round him! Through the roaring in his ears he thought he heard drumbeats, and the fanfare of the trumpet, and voices. The next moment he had lost all consciousness.

When he came to, he was lying in the guard-room of the Presidio. Among the group of people who surrounded him he recognized the gaunt features of the commander, the sympathetic eyes of Father Esteban, and the fisherman who had disappeared. When he rose on his elbow, and attempted to lift himself feebly, the fisherman, with a cry of gratitude, threw himself on his knees, and kissed his helpless hand.

"He lives, he lives! your excellencies! Saints be praised, he lives! The hero — the brave Americano — the noble caballero who delivered me from the madman."

"Who are you? and whence come you?" demanded the commander of Hurlstone, with grave austerity.

Hurlstone hesitated; the priest leaned forward with a half anxious, half warning gesture. There was a sudden rustle in the passage; the crowd gave way as Miss Keene, followed by Mrs. Markham, entered. The young girl's eyes caught those of the prostrate man. With an impulsive cry she ran towards him.

"Mr. Hurlstone!"

"Hurlstone," echoed the group, pressing nearer the astonished man.

The comandante lifted his hand gravely with a gesture of silence, and then slowly removed his plumed hat. Every head was instantly uncovered.

"Long live our brave and noble ally, Don Diego! Long live the beautiful Doña Leonor!"

A faint shade of sadness passed over the priest's face. He glanced from Hurlstone to Miss Keene.

"Then you have consented?" he whispered.

Hurlstone cast a rapid glance at Eleanor Keene.

"I consent!"

PART II. FREED

CHAPTER I

THE MOURNERS AT SAN FRANCISCO

THE telegraph operator at the Golden Gate of San Francisco had long since given up hope of the Excelsior. During the months of September and October, 1854, stimulated by the promised reward, and often by the actual presence of her owners, he had shown zeal and hope in his scrutiny of the incoming ships. The gaunt arms of the semaphore at Fort Point, turned against the sunset sky, had regularly recorded the smallest vessel of the white-winged fleet which sought the portal of the bay during that eventful year of immigration; but the Excelsior was not amongst them. At the close of the year 1854 she was a tradition; by the end of January, 1855, she was forgotten. Had she been engulfed in her own element she could not have been more completely swallowed up than in the changes of that shore she never reached. Whatever interest or hope was still kept alive in solitary breasts the world never knew. By the significant irony of Fate, even the old-time semaphore that should have signaled her was abandoned and forgotten.

The mention of her name — albeit in a quiet, unconcerned voice — in the dress-circle of a San Francisco theatre, during the performance of a popular female star, was therefore so peculiar that it could only have come from the lips of some one personally interested in the lost vessel. Yet the speaker was a youngish, feminine-looking man of

about thirty, notable for his beardlessness, in the crowded circle of bearded and moustachioed Californians, and had been one of the most absorbed of the enthusiastic audience. A weak smile of vacillating satisfaction and uneasiness played on his face during the plaudits of his fellow-admirers, as if he were alternately gratified and annoyed. It might have passed for a discriminating and truthful criticism of the performance, which was a classical burlesque, wherein the star displayed an unconventional frankness of shapely limbs and unrestrained gestures and glances; but he applauded the more dubious parts equally with the audience. He was evidently familiar with the performance, for a look of eager expectation greeted most of the "business." Either he had not come for the entire evening, or he did not wish to appear as if he had, as he sat on one of the back benches near the passage, and frequently changed his place. He was well, even foppishly, dressed for the period, and appeared to be familiarly known to the loungers in the passage as a man of some social popularity.

He had just been recognized by a man of apparently equal importance and distinction, who had quietly and unconsciously taken a seat by his side, and the recognition appeared equally unexpected and awkward. The new-comer was the older and more decorous-looking, with an added formality of manner and self-assertion that did not, however, conceal a certain habitual shrewdness of eye and lip. He wore a full beard, but the absence of a moustache left the upper half of his handsome and rather satirical mouth uncovered. His dress was less pronounced than his companion's, but of a type of older and more established gentility.

"I was a little late coming from the office to-night," said the younger man, with an embarrassed laugh, "and I thought I'd drop in here on my way home. Pretty rough outside, ain't it?"

"Yes, it's raining and blowing; so I thought I would n't

go up to the plaza for a cab, but wait here for the first one that dropped a fare at the door, and take it on to the hotel."

"Hold on, and I'll go with you," said the young man carelessly. "I say, Brimmer," he added, after a pause, with a sudden assumption of larger gayety, "there's nothing mean about Belle Montgomery, eh? She's a whole team and the little dog under the wagon, ain't she? Deuced pretty woman! — no make-up there, eh?"

"She certainly is a fine woman," said Brimmer gravely, borrowing his companion's lorgnette. "By the way, Markham, do you usually keep an opera-glass in your office in case of an emergency like this?"

"I reckon it was forgotten in my overcoat pocket," said Markham, with an embarrassed smile.

"Left over from the last time," said Brimmer, rising from his seat. "Well, I'm going now — I suppose I'll have to try the plaza."

"Hold on a moment. She's coming on now — there she is!" He stopped, his anxious eyes fixed upon the stage. Brimmer turned at the same moment in no less interested absorption. A quick hush ran through the theatre; the men bent eagerly forward as the Queen of Olympus swept down to the footlights, and, with a ravishing smile, seemed to envelop the whole theatre in a gracious caress.

"You know, 'pon my word, Brimmer, she's a very superior woman," gasped Markham excitedly, when the goddess had temporarily withdrawn. "These fellows here," he said, indicating the audience contemptuously, "don't know her, — think she's all that sort of thing, you know, — and come here just to *look* at her. But she's very accomplished — in fact, a kind of literary woman. Writes devilish good poetry — only took up the stage on account of domestic trouble: drunken husband that beat her — regular affecting story, you know. These sap-headed fools

don't, of course, know *that*. No, sir; she's a remarkable woman! I say, Brimmer, look here! I" — he hesitated, and then went on more boldly, as if he had formed a sudden resolution. "What have you got to do to-night?"

Brimmer, who had been lost in abstraction, started slightly, and said, —

"I — oh! I've got an appointment with Keene. You know he's off by the steamer — day after to-morrow?"

"What! He's not going off on that wild-goose chase, after all? Why, the man's got Excelsior on the brain!" He stopped as he looked at Brimmer's cold face, and suddenly colored. "I mean his plan — his idea's all nonsense — you know that!"

"I certainly don't agree with him," began Brimmer gravely; "but" —

"The idea," interrupted Markham, encouraged by Brimmer's beginning, "of his knocking around the Gulf of California, and getting up an expedition to go inland, just because a mail-steamer saw a barque like the Excelsior off Mazatlan last August. As if the Excelsior would n't have gone into Mazatlan if it had been her! I tell you what it is, Brimmer: it's mighty rough on you and me, and it ain't the square thing at all — after all we've done, and the money we've spent, and the nights we've sat up over the Excelsior — to have this young fellow Keene always putting up the bluff of his lost sister on us! His lost sister, indeed! as if *we* had n't any feelings."

The two men looked at each other, and each felt it incumbent to look down and sigh deeply — not hypocritically, but perfunctorily, as over a past grief, although anger had been the dominant expression of the speaker.

"I was about to remark," said Brimmer practically, "that the insurance on the Excelsior having been paid, her loss is a matter of commercial record; and that, in a business point of view, this plan of Keene's ain't worth

looking at. As a private matter of our own feelings — purely domestic — there 's no question but that we must sympathize with him, although he refuses to let us join in the expenses."

"Oh, as to that," said Markham hurriedly, "I told him to draw on me for a thousand dollars last time I saw him. No, sir; it ain't that. What gets me is this darned nagging and simpering around, and opening old sores, and putting on sentimental style, and doing the bereaved business generally. I reckon he 'd be even horrified to see you and me here — though it was just a chance with both of us."

"I think not," said Brimmer dryly. "He knows Miss Montgomery already. They 're going by the same steamer."

Markham looked up quickly.

"Impossible! She 's going by the other line to Panama; that is" — he hesitated — "I heard it from the agent."

"She 's changed her mind, so Keene says," returned Brimmer. "She 's going by way of Nicaragua. He stops at San Juan to reconnoitre the coast up to Mazatlan. Good-night. It 's no use waiting here for a cab any longer, I'm off."

"Hold on!" said Markham, struggling out of a sudden uneasy reflection. "I say, Brimmer," he resumed, with an enforced smile, which he tried to make playful, "your engagement with Keene won't keep you long. What do you say to having a little supper with Miss Montgomery, eh? — perfectly proper, you know — at our hotel? Just a few friends, eh?"

Brimmer's eyes and lips slightly contracted.

"I believe I am already invited," he said quietly. "Keene asked me. In fact, that 's the appointment. Strange he did n't speak of you," he added dryly.

"I suppose it's some later arrangement," Markham replied with feigned carelessness. "Do you know her?"

"Slightly."

"You did n't say so!"

"You did n't ask me," said Brimmer. "She came to consult me about South American affairs. It seems that filibuster General Leonidas, *alias* Perkins, whose little game we stopped by that Peruvian contract, actually landed in Quinquinambo and established a government. It seems she knows him, has a great admiration for him as a Liberator, as she calls him. I think they correspond!"

"She's a wonderful woman, by jingo, Brimmer! I'd like to hear whom she don't know," said Markham, beaming with a patronizing vanity. "There's you, and there's that filibuster, and old Governor Pico, that she's just snatched bald-headed — I mean, you know, that he recognizes her worth, don't you see? Not like this cattle you see here."

"Are you coming with me?" said Brimmer, gravely buttoning up his coat, as if encasing himself in a panoply of impervious respectability.

"I'll join you at the hotel," said Markham hurriedly. "There's a man over there in the parquet that I want to say a word to; don't wait for me."

With a slight inclination of the head, Mr. Brimmer passed out into the lobby, erect, self-possessed, and impeccable. One or two of his commercial colleagues of maturer age, who were loitering leisurely by the wall, unwilling to compromise themselves by actually sitting down, took heart of grace at this correct apparition. Brimmer nodded to them coolly, as if on 'Change, and made his way out of the theatre. He had scarcely taken a few steps before a furious onset of wind and rain drove him into a doorway for shelter. At the same moment a slouching figure, with a turned-up coat-collar, slipped past him and disappeared in a passage

at his right. Partly hidden by his lowered umbrella, Mr. Brimmer himself escaped notice, but he instantly recognized his late companion, Markham. As he resumed his way up the street he glanced into the passage. Halfway down, a light flashed upon the legend "Stage Entrance." Quincy Brimmer, with a faint smile, passed on to his hotel.

It was striking half-past eleven when Mr. Brimmer again issued from his room in the Oriental and passed down a long corridor. Pausing a moment before a side hall that opened from it, he cast a rapid look up and down the corridor, and then knocked hastily at a door. It was opened sharply by a lady's maid, who fell back respectfully before Mr. Brimmer's all-correct presence.

Half reclining on a sofa in the parlor of an elaborate suite of apartments was the woman whom Mr. Brimmer had a few hours before beheld on the stage of the theatre. Lifting her eyes languidly from a book that lay ostentatiously on her lap, she beckoned her visitor to approach. She was a woman still young, whose statuesque beauty had but slightly suffered from cosmetics, late hours, and the habitual indulgence of certain hysterical emotions that were not only inconsistent with the classical suggestions of her figure, but had left traces not unlike the grosser excitement of alcoholic stimulation. She looked like a tinted statue whose slight mutations through stress of time and weather had been unwisely repaired by freshness of color.

"I am such a creature of nerves," she said, raising a superb neck and extending a goddess-like arm, "that I am always perfectly exhausted after the performance. I fly, as you see, to my first love — poetry — as soon as Rosina has changed my dress. It is not generally known — but I don't mind telling *you* — that I often nerve myself for the effort of acting by reading some well-remembered passage from my favorite poets, as I stand by the wings. I quaff, as one might say, a single draught of the Pierian spring before I go on."

The exact relations between the humorous "walk round," in which Miss Montgomery usually made her first entrance, and the volume of Byron she held in her hand, did not trouble Mr. Brimmer so much as the beautiful arm with which she emphasized it. Neither did it strike him that the distinguishing indications of a poetic exaltation were at all unlike the effects of a grosser stimulant known as the "Champagne cocktail" on the less sensitive organization of her colleagues. Touched by her melancholy but fascinating smile, he said gallantly that he had observed no sign of exhaustion, or want of power, in her performance that evening.

"Then you were there!" she said, fixing her eyes upon him with an expression of mournful gratitude. "You actually left your business and the calls of public duty to see the poor mountebank perform her nightly task."

"I was there with a friend of yours," answered Brimmer soberly, "who actually asked me to the supper to which Mr. Keene had already invited me, and which *you* had been kind enough to suggest to me a week ago."

"True, I had forgotten," said Miss Montgomery, with a large goddess-like indifference that was more effective with the man before her than the most elaborate explanation. "You don't mind them — do you? — for we are all friends together. My position, you know," she added sadly, "prevents my always following my own inclinations or preferences. Poor Markham, I fear the world does not do justice to his gentle, impressible nature. I sympathize with him deeply; we have both had our afflictions, we have both — lost. Good heavens!" she exclaimed, with a sudden exaggerated start of horror, "what have I done? Forgive my want of tact, dear friend; I had forgotten, wretched being that I am, that *you* too" —

She caught his hand in both hers, and bowed her head over it as if unable to finish her sentence.

Brimmer, who had been utterly mystified and amazed at this picture of Markham's disconsolate attitude to the world, and particularly to the woman before him, was completely finished by this latter tribute to his own affliction. His usually composed features, however, easily took upon themselves a graver cast as he kept, and pressed, the warm hands in his own.

"Fool that I was," continued Miss Montgomery; "in thinking of poor Markham's childlike, open grief, I forgot the deeper sorrow that the more manly heart experiences under an exterior that seems cold and impassible. Yes," she said, raising her languid eyes to Brimmer, "I ought to have felt the throb of that volcano under its mask of snow. You have taught me a lesson."

Withdrawing her hands hastily, as if the volcano had shown some signs of activity, she leaned back on the sofa again.

"You are not yet reconciled to Mr. Keene's expedition, then?" she asked languidly.

"I believe that everything has been already done," said Brimmer, somewhat stiffly; "all sources of sensible inquiry have been exhausted by me. But I envy Keene the eminently practical advantage his unpractical journey gives him," he added, arresting himself, gallantly; he goes with you."

"Truly!" said Miss Montgomery, with the melancholy abstraction of a stage soliloquy. "Beyond obeying the dictates of his brotherly affection, he gains no real advantage in learning whether his sister is alive or dead. The surety of her death would not make him freer than he is now — freer to absolutely follow the dictates of a new affection; free to make his own life again. It is a sister, not a wife, he seeks."

Mr. Brimmer's forehead slightly contracted. He leaned back a little more rigidly in his chair, and fixed a critical,

half supercilious look upon her. She did not seem to notice his almost impertinent scrutiny, but sat silent, with her eyes bent on the carpet, in gloomy abstraction.

"Can you keep a secret?" she said, as if with a sudden resolution.

"Yes," said Brimmer briefly, without changing his look.

"You know I am a married woman. You have heard the story of my wrongs?"

"I have heard them," said Brimmer dryly.

"Well, the husband who abused and deserted me was, I have reason to believe, a passenger on the Excelsior."

"M'Corkle! — impossible. There was no such name on the passenger list."

"M'Corkle!" repeated Miss Montgomery, with a dissonant tone in her voice and a slight flash in her eyes. "What are you thinking of? There never was a Mr. M'Corkle; it was one of my *noms de plume*. And where did *you* hear it?"

"I beg your pardon, I must have got it from the press notices of your book of poetry. I knew that Montgomery was only a stage name, and as it was necessary that I should have another in making the business investments you were good enough to charge me with, I used what I thought was your real name. It can be changed, or you can sign M'Corkle."

"Let it go," said Miss Montgomery, resuming her former manner. "What matters? I wish there was no such thing as business. Well," she resumed, after a pause, "my husband's name is Hurlstone."

"But there was no Hurlstone on the passenger list either," said Brimmer. "I knew them all, and their friends."

"Not in the list from the States; but if he came on board at Callao, you would n't have known it. *I* knew

that he arrived there on the Osprey a few days before the Excelsior sailed."

Mr. Brimmer's eyes changed their expression.

"And you want to find him?"

"No," she said, with an actress's gesture. "I want to know the truth. I want to know if I am still tied to this man, or if I am free to follow the dictates of my own conscience, — to make my life anew, — to become — you see I am not ashamed to say it — to become the honest wife of some honest man."

"A divorce would suit your purpose equally," said Brimmer coldly. "It can be easily obtained."

"A divorce! Do you know what that means to a woman in my profession? It is a badge of shame, — a certificate of disgrace, — an advertisement to every miserable wretch who follows me with his advances that I have no longer the sanctity of girlhood, nor the protection of a wife."

There was tragic emotion in her voice, there were tears in her eyes. Mr. Brimmer, gazing at her with what he firmly thought to be absolute and incisive penetration, did not believe either. But like most practical analysis of the half-motived sex, he was only half right. The emotion and the tears were as real as anything else in the woman under criticism, notwithstanding that they were not as real as they would have been in the man who criticised. He, however, did her full justice on a point where most men and all women misjudged her: he believed that, through instinct and calculation, she had been materially faithful to her husband; that this large goddess-like physique had all the impeccability of a goddess; that the hysterical dissipation in which she indulged herself was purely mental, and usurped and preoccupied all other emotions. In this public exposition of her beauty there was no sense of shame, for there was no sense of the passion it evoked. And he was right. But there he should have stopped. Unfortunately,

his masculine logic forced him to supply a reason for her coldness in the existence of some more absorbing passion. He believed her ambitious and calculating: she was neither. He believed she might have made him an admirable copartner and practical helpmeet: he was wrong.

"You know my secret now," she continued. "You know why I am anxious to know my fate. You understand now why I sympathize with" — she stopped, and made a half contemptuous gesture — "with these men Markham and Keene. *They* do not know it; perhaps they prefer to listen to their own vanity — that 's the way of most men; but you do know it, and you have no excuse for misjudging me, or undeceiving them." She stopped and looked at the clock. "They will be here in five minutes; do you wish them to find you already here?"

"It is as *you* wish," stammered Brimmer, completely losing his self-possession.

"I have no wish," she said, with a sublime gesture of indifference. "If you wait you can entertain them here, while Rosina is dressing me in the next room. We sup in the larger room across the hall."

As she disappeared, Quincy Brimmer rose irresolutely from his seat and checked a half uttered exclamation. Then he turned nervously to the parlor door. What a senseless idiot he had become! He had never for an instant conceived the idea of making this preliminary confidential visit known to the others; he had no wish to suggest the appearance of an assignation with the woman, who, rightly or wrongly, was notorious; he had nothing to gain by this voluntary assumption of a compromising attitude; yet here he was, he — Mr. Brimmer — with the appearance of being installed in her parlor, receiving her visitors, and dispensing her courtesies. Only a man recklessly in love would be guilty of such an indiscretion — even Markham's feebleness had never reached this absurdity.

In the midst of his uneasiness there was a knock at the door; he opened it himself nervously and sharply. Markham's self-satisfied face drew back in alarm and embarrassment at the unexpected apparition. The sight restored Brimmer's coolness and satirical self-possession.

"I — I — did n't know you were here," stammered Markham. "I left Keene in your room."

"Then why did n't you bring him along with you?" said Brimmer maliciously. "Go and fetch him."

"Yes; but he said you were to meet him there," continued Markham, glancing around the empty room with a slight expression of relief.

"My watch was twenty minutes fast, and I had given him up," said Brimmer, with mendacious effrontery. "Miss Montgomery is dressing. You can bring him here before she returns."

Markham flew uneasily down the corridor and quickly returned with a handsome young fellow of five-and-twenty, whose frank face was beaming with excitement and youthful energy. The two elder men could not help regarding him with a mingled feeling of envy and compassion.

"Did you tell Brimmer yet?" said Keene, with animation.

"I have n't had time," hesitated Markham. "The fact is, Brimmer, I think of going with Keene on this expedition."

"Indeed!" said Brimmer superciliously.

"Yes," said Markham, coloring slightly. "You see, we 've got news. Tell him, Dick."

"The Storm Cloud got in yesterday from Valparaiso and Central American ports," said Keene, with glowing cheeks. "I boarded her, as usual, last night, for information. The mate says there is a story of a man picked up crazy, in an open fishing-boat, somewhere off the peninsula, and brought into hospital at San Juan last August. He recovered

enough lately to tell his story and claim to be Captain Bunker of the Excelsior, whose crew mutinied and ran her ashore in a fog. But the boat in which he was picked up was a Mexican fishing-boat, and there was something revolutionary and political about the story, so that the authorities detained him. The consul has just been informed of the circumstances, and has taken the matter in hand."

"It 's a queer story," said Brimmer, gazing from the one to the other, "and I will look into it also to-morrow. If it is true," he added slowly, "I will go with you."

Richard Keene extended his hand impulsively to his two elders.

"You 'll excuse me for saying it, Brimmer — and you, too, Markham — but this is just what I 've been looking forward to. Not but what I 'd have found Nell without your assistance; but you see, boys, it *did* look mighty mean in me to make more fuss about a sister than you would for your wives! But now that 's all settled" —

"We 'll go to supper," said Miss Montgomery theatrically, appearing at the door. "Dick will give me his arm."

CHAPTER II

THE MOURNERS AT TODOS SANTOS

THERE was a breath of spring in the soft morning air of Todos Santos — a breath so subtle and odorous that it penetrated the veil of fog beyond the bay, and for a moment lingered on the deck of a passing steamer like an arresting memory. But only for an instant; the Ometepe, bound from San Francisco to San Juan del Norte, with its four seekers of the Excelsior, rolled and plunged on its way unconsciously.

Within the bay and over the restful pueblo still dwelt the golden haze of its perpetual summer; the two towers of the old Mission church seemed to dissolve softly into the mellow upper twilight, and the undulating valleys rolled their green waves up to the wooded heights of San Antonio, that still smiled down upon the arid, pallid desert. But although Nature had not changed in the months that had passed since the advent of the Excelsior, there appeared some strange mutations in the town and its inhabitants. On the beach below the Presidio was the unfinished skeleton of a small sea-going vessel on rude stocks; on the plaza rose the framed walls and roofless rafters of a wooden building; near the Embarcadero was the tall adobe chimney of some inchoate manufactory whose walls had half risen from their foundations; but all of these objects had evidently succumbed to the drowsy influence of the climate, and already had taken the appearances of later and less picturesque ruins of the past. There were singular innovations in the costumes: one or two umbrellas, used as sunshades, were seen

upon the square; a few small chip hats had taken the place of the stiff sombreros, with an occasional tall white beaver; while linen coat and nankeen trousers had at times usurped the short velvet jacket and loose calzas of the national costume.

At San Antonio the change was still more perceptible. Beside the yawning pit of the abandoned silver mine a straggling building arose, filled with rude machinery, bearing the legend, painted in glowing letters, "Excelsior Silver Mining Co., J. Crosby, Superintendent;" and in the midst of certain excavations assailing the integrity of the cliff itself was another small building, scarcely larger than a sentry-box, with the inscription, "Office: Eleanor Quicksilver Smelting Works."

Basking in that yellow morning sunlight, with his back against his office, Mr. Brace was seated on the ground, rolling a cigarette. A few feet from him Crosby, extended on his back on the ground, was lazily puffing rings of smoke into the still air. Both of these young gentlemen were dressed in exaggerated Mexican costumes; the silver buttons fringing the edge of Crosby's calza, open from the knee down to show a glimpse of the snowy under-trouser, were richer and heavier than those usually worn; while Brace, in addition to the crimson silk sash round his waist, wore a crimson handkerchief around his head, under his sombrero.

"Pepe's falling off in his tobacco," said Brace. "I think I'll have to try some other Fonda."

"How's Banks getting on with his crop?" asked Crosby. "You know he was going to revolutionize the business, and cut out Cuba on that hillside."

"Oh, the usual luck! He couldn't get proper cultivators, and the Injins wouldn't work regular. I must try and get hold of some of the comandante's stock; but I'm out of favor with the old man since Winslow and I wrecked that fishing-boat on the rocks off yonder. He always be-

lieved we were trying to run off, like Captain Bunker. That 's why he stopped our shipbuilding, I really believe."

"All the same, we might have had it built and ready now but for our laziness. We might have worked on it nights without their knowing it, and slipped off some morning in the fog."

"And we would n't have got one of the women to go with us! If we are getting shiftless here — and I don't say we 're not — these women have just planted themselves and have taken root. But that ain't all: there 's the influence of that infernal sneak Hurlstone! He 's set the comandante against us, you know; he, and the priest, the comandante, and Nelly Keene make up the real Council of Todos Santos. Between them they 've shoved out the poor little alcalde, who 's ready to give up everything to dance attendance on Mrs. Brimmer. They run the whole concern, and they give out that it 's owing to them that we 're given parole of the town, and the privilege of spending our money and working these mines. Who 'd have thought that sneak Hurlstone would have played his cards so well? It makes me regularly sick to hear him called 'Don Diego.'"

"Yet you 're mightily tickled when that black-eyed sister of the alcalde calls you 'Don Carlos,'" said Crosby, yawning.

"Doña Isabel," said Brace, with some empressement, "is a lady of position, and these are only her national courtesies."

"She just worships Miss Keene, and I reckon she knows by this time all about your old attentions to her friend," said Crosby, with lazy mischief.

"My attentions to Miss Keene were simply those of an ordinary acquaintance, and were never as strongly marked as yours to Mrs. Brimmer."

"Who has deserted *me* as Miss Keene did *you*," rejoined Crosby.

Brace's quick color had risen again, and he would have made some sharp retort, but the jingling of spurs caught his ear. They both turned quickly, and saw Banks approaching. He was dressed as a vaquero, but with his companions' like exaggeration of detail; yet, while his spurs were enormous, and his sombrero unusually expansive, he still clung to his high shirt-collars and accurately tied check cravat.

"Well?" he said, approaching them.

"Well?" said Crosby.

"Well?" repeated Brace.

After this national salutation, the three Americans regarded each other silently.

"Knocked off cultivating to-day?" queried Crosby, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"The peons have," said. Banks; "it's another saint's day. That's the fourth in two weeks. Leaves about two clear working days in each week, counting for the days off, when they're getting over the effects of the others. I tell you what, sir, the Catholic religion is not suited to a working civilization, or else the calendar ought to be overhauled and a lot of these saints put on the retired list. It's hard enough to have all the Apostles on your pay-roll, so to speak, but to have a lot of fellows run in on you as saints, and some of them not even men or women, but *ideas*, is piling up the agony! I don't wonder they call the place 'All Saints.' The only thing to do," continued Banks severely, "is to open communication with the desert, and run in some of the heathen tribes outside. I've made a proposition to the council offering to take five hundred of them in the raw, unregenerate state, and turn 'em over after a year to the Church. If I could get Hurlstone to do some log-rolling with that padre, his friend, I might get the bill through. But I'm always put off till to-morrow. Everything here is 'Hasta mañana; hasta mañana,' always. I

believe when the last trump is sounded, they 'll say, 'Hasta mañana.' What are *you* doing?" he said, after a pause.

"Waiting for your ship," answered Crosby sarcastically.

"Well, you can laugh, gentlemen — but you won't have to wait long. According to my calculations that Mexican ship is about due now. And I ain't basing my figures on anything the Mexican Government is going to do, or any commercial speculation. I 'm reckoning on the Catholic Church."

The two men languidly looked towards him. Banks continued gravely, —

"I made the proper inquiries, and I find that the stock of rosaries, scapularies, blessed candles, and other ecclesiastical goods, is running low. I find that just at the nick of time a fresh supply always comes from the Bishop of Guadalajara, with instructions from the Church. Now, gentlemen, my opinion is that the Church, and the Church only, knows the secret of the passage through the foggy channel, and keeps it to itself. I look at this commercially, as a question of demand and supply. Well, sir, the only real trader here at Todos Santos is the Church."

"Then you don't take in account the interests of Brimmer, Markham, and Keene," said Brace. "Do you suppose they 're doing nothing?"

"I don't say they 're not; but you 're confounding interests with *instincts*. They have n't got the instinct to find this place, and all that they 've done and are doing is blind calculation. Just look at the facts. As the filibuster who captured the Excelsior of course changed her name, her rig-out, and her flag, and even got up a false register for her, she 's as good as lost, as far as the world knows, until she lands at Quinquinambo. Then supposing that she 's found out, and the whole story is known — although everything 's against such a proposition — the news has got to go back to San Francisco before the real search will

be begun. As to any clue that might come from Captain Bunker, that 's still more remote. Allowing he crossed the bar and got out of the channel, he was n't at the right time for meeting a passing steamer; and the only coasters are Mexican. If he did n't die of delirium tremens, or exposure, and was really picked up in his senses by some other means, he would have been back with succor before this, if only to get our evidence to prove the loss of the vessel. No, sir; sooner or later, of course, the San Francisco crowd are bound to find us here. And if it was n't for my crops and our mine, I would n't be in a hurry for them; but our *first* hold is the Church."

He stopped. Crosby was asleep. Brace arose lazily, lounged into his office, and closed his desk.

"Going to shut for the day?" said Banks, yawning.

"I reckon," said Brace dubiously; "I don't know but I 'd take a little *pasear* into the town if I had my horse ready."

"Take mine, and I 'll trapse over on foot to the Ranche with Crosby — after a spell. You 'll find him under that big madroño, if he has not already wound himself up with his lariat by walking round it. Those Mexican horses can't go straight even when they graze — they must feed in a circle. He 's a little fresh, so look out for him!"

"All the better. I 'd like to get into town just after the siesta."

"Siesta!" echoed Banks, lying comfortably down in the shade just vacated by Brace; "that 's another of their shiftless practices. Two hours out of every day — that 's a day out of the week — spent in a hammock; and during business hours too! It 's disgraceful, sir, simply disgraceful."

He turned over and closed his eyes, as if to reflect on its enormity.

Brace had no difficulty in finding the mare, although some trouble in mounting her. But, like his companions,

having quickly adopted the habits of the country, he had become a skillful and experienced horseman, and the mustang, after a few springless jumps, which failed to unseat him, submitted to her rider. The young man galloped rapidly towards Todos Santos; but when within a few miles of the pueblo he slackened his pace. From the smiles and greetings of wayfarers — among whom were some pretty Indian girls and mestizas — it was evident that the handsome young foreigner, who had paid them the compliment of extravagantly adopting their national costume, was neither an unfamiliar nor an unpleasing spectacle. When he reached the posada at the top of the hilly street, he even carried his simulation of the local customs to the point of charging the veranda at full speed, and pulling up suddenly at the threshold, after the usual fashion of vaqueros. The impetuous apparition brought a short stout man to the door, who, welcoming him with effusive politeness, conducted him to an inner room that gave upon a green grass courtyard. Seated before a rude table, sipping aguardiente, were his countryman Winslow and two traders of the pueblo. They were evidently of the number already indicated who had adopted the American fashions. Señor Ruiz wore a linen "duster" in place of his embroidered jacket, and Señor Martinez had an American beard, or "goatee," in imitation of Mr. Banks. The air was yellow with the fumes of tobacco, through which the shrewd eyes of Winslow gleamed murkily.

"This," he said to his countryman, in fluent if not elegant Spanish, indicating the gentleman who had imitated Banks, "is a man of ideas, and a power in Todos Santos. He would control all the votes in his district if there were anything like popular suffrage here, and he understands the American policy."

Señor Martinez here hastened to inform Mr. Brace that he had long cherished a secret and enthusiastic admiration

for that grand and magnanimous nation of which his friend was such a noble representative; that, indeed, he might say it was an inherited taste, for had not his grandfather once talked with the American whaling Capitano Coffino and partaken of a subtle spirit known as "er-r-rum" on his ship at Acapulco?

"There 's nothing mean about Martinez," said Winslow to Brace confidentially, in English. "He 's up to anything, and ready from the word 'Go.' Don't you think he 's a little like Banks, you know — a sort of Mexican edition. And there is Ruiz, he 's a cattle dealer; he 'd be a good friend of Banks, if Banks was n't so infernally self-opinionated. But Ruiz ain't a fool, either. He 's picked up a little English — good American, I mean — from me already."

Señor Ruiz here smiled affably, to show his comprehension; and added slowly, with great gravity, —

"It is of twenty-four year I have first time the Americano of your beautiful country known. He have buy the hides and horns of the cattle — for his ship — here."

"Here?" echoed Brace. "I thought no American ship — no ship at all — had been in here for fifty years."

Ruiz shrugged his shoulders and cast a glance at his friend Martinez, lowered his voice and lifted his eyelashes at the same moment, and, jerking his yellow, tobacco-stained thumb over his arm, said, —

"Ah — of a verity — on the beach — two leagues away."

"Do you hear that?" said Winslow, turning complacently to Brace and rising to his feet. "Don't you see now what hogwash the commander, alcalde, and the priest have been cramming down our throats about this place being sealed up for fifty years? What he says is all Gospel truth. That's what I wanted you fellows to hear, and you might have heard before, only you were afraid of compromising yourselves by talking with the people. You got it into

your heads — and the comandante helped you to get it there — that Todos Santos was a sort of Sleepy Hollow, and that no one knew anything of the political changes for the last fifty years. Well, what 's the fact? Ask Ruiz there, and Martinez, and they 'll both tell you they know that Mexico got her independence in 1826, and that the council keep it dark that they may perpetuate themselves. They know," he continued, lowering his voice, "that the commander's commission from the old viceroy is n't worth the paper it is stamped upon."

"But what about the Church?" asked Brace hesitatingly, remembering Banks's theory.

"The Church — carambà! the priests were ever with the Escossas, the aristocrats, and against the Yorkenos, the men of the Republic — the people," interrupted Martinez vehemently; "they will not accept, they will not proclaim the Republic to the people. They shut their eyes, so —. They fold their hands, so —. They say, 'Sicut era principio et nunc et semper in secula seculorum!' Look you, señor, I am not of the Church — no, carambà! I snap my fingers at the priests. Ah! what they give one is food for the bull's horns, believe me — I have read 'Tompano,' the American 'Tompano.'"

"Who 's he?" asked Brace.

"He means Tom Paine! 'The Age of Reason' — you know," said Winslow, gazing with a mixture of delight and patronizing pride at the Radicals of Todos Santos. "Oh! he 's no fool — is Martinez, nor Ruiz either! And while you 've been flirting with Doña Isabel, and Banks has been trying to log-roll the padre, and Crosby going in for siestas, *I* 've found them out. And there are a few more — are n't there, Ruiz?"

Ruiz darted a mysterious glance at Brace, and apparently not trusting himself to speak, checked off his ten fingers dramatically in the air thrice.

"As many of a surety! God and liberty!"

"But, if this is so, why have n't they *done* something?"

Señor Martinez glanced at Señor Ruiz.

"Hasta mañana!" he said slowly.

"Oh, this is a case of 'Hasta mañana!'" said Brace, somewhat relieved.

"They can wait," returned Winslow hurriedly. "It 's too big a thing to rush into without looking round. You know what it means? Either Todos Santos is in rebellion against the present Government of Mexico, or she is independent of any. Her present government, in any event, don't represent either the Republic of Mexico or the people of Todos Santos — don't you see? And in that case *we* 've got as good a right here as any one."

"He speaks the truth," said Ruiz, grasping a hand of Brace and Winslow each; "in this we are — as brothers."

"God and liberty!" ejaculated Martinez, in turn seizing the other disengaged hands of the Americans, and completing the mystic circle.

"God and liberty!" echoed a thin chorus from their host and a few loungers who had entered unperceived.

Brace felt uneasy. He was not wanting in the courage or daring of youth, but it struck him that his attitude was by no means consistent with his attentions to Doña Isabel. He managed to get Winslow aside.

"This is all very well as a 'free lunch' conspiracy; but you 're forgetting your parole," he said, in a low voice.

"We gave our parole to the present government. When it no longer exists, there will be no parole — don't you see?"

"Then these fellows prefer waiting" —

"Until we can get *outside* help, you understand. The first American ship that comes in here — eh?"

Brace felt relieved. After all, his position in regard to the alcalde's sister would not be compromised; he might

even be able to extend some protection over her; and it would be a magnanimous revenge if he could even offer it to Miss Keene.

"I see you don't swear anybody to secrecy," he said, with a laugh; "shall I speak to Crosby, or will you?"

"Not yet; he 'll only see something to laugh at. And Banks and Martinez would quarrel at once, and go back on each other. No; my idea is to let some outsider do for Todos Santos what Perkins did for Quinquinambo. Do you take?"

His long, thin, dyspeptic face lit up with a certain small political cunning and shrewdness that struck Brace with a half-respect.

"I say, Winslow, you 'd have made a first-class caucus leader in San Francisco."

Winslow smiled complacently. "There 's something better to play on here than ward politics," he replied. "There 's a material here that — like the mine and the soil — ain't half developed. I reckon I can show Banks something that beats lobbying and log-rolling for contracts. I 've let you into this thing to show you a sample of my prospecting. Keep it to yourself if you want it to pay. Dat 's me, George! Good-by! I 'll be out to the office to-morrow!"

He turned back towards his brother politicians with an expression of satisfied conceit that Brace for a moment envied. The latter even lingered on the veranda, as if he would have asked Winslow another question; but, looking at his watch, he suddenly recollected himself, and, mounting his horse, cantered down towards the plaza.

The hour of siesta was not yet over, and the streets were still deserted — probably the reason why the politicians of Todos Santos had chosen that hour for their half secret meeting. At the corner of the plaza he dismounted and led his horse to the public hitching-post — gnawn and

nibbled by the teeth of generations of mustangs — and turned into the narrow lane flanked by the walls of the alcalde's garden. Halfway down he stopped before a slight breach in the upper part of the adobe barrier, and looked cautiously around. The long, shadowed vista of the lane was unobstructed by any moving figure as far as the yellow light of the empty square beyond. With a quick leap he gained the top of the wall and disappeared on the other side.

CHAPTER III

INTERNATIONAL COURTESIES

The garden over whose wall Brace had mysteriously vanished was apparently as deserted as the lane and plaza without. But its solitude was one of graceful shadow and restful loveliness. A tropical luxuriance, that had perpetuated itself year after year, until it was half suffocated in its own overgrowth and strangled with its own beauty, spread over a variegated expanse of starry flowers, shimmering leaves, and slender inextricable branches, pierced here and there by towering rigid cactus spikes or the curved plumes of palms. The repose of ages lay in its hushed groves, its drooping vines, its lifeless creepers; the dry dust of its decaying leaves and branches mingled with the living perfumes like the spiced embalmings of a forgotten past.

Nevertheless, this tranquillity, after a few moments, was singularly disturbed. There was no breeze stirring, and yet the long fronds of a large fan palm, that stood near the breach in the wall, began to move gently from right to left, like the arms of some graceful semaphore, and then as suddenly stopped. Almost at the same moment a white curtain, listlessly hanging from a canopied balcony of the alcalde's house, began to exhibit a like rhythmical and regular agitation. Then everything was motionless again; an interval of perfect peace settled upon the garden. It was broken by the apparition of Brace under the balcony, and the black-veiled and flowered head of Doña Isabel from the curtain above.

"Crazy boy!"

"Señorita!"

"Hush! I am coming down!"

"You? But Doña Ursula!"

"There is no more Doña Ursula!"

"Well — your duenna, whoever she is!"

"There is no duenna!"

"What?"

"Hush up your tongue, idiot boy!" (this in English.)

The little black head and the rose on top of it disappeared. Brace drew himself up against the wall and waited. The time seemed interminable. Impatiently looking up and down, he at last saw Doña Isabel at a distance, quietly and unconcernedly moving among the roses, and occasionally stooping as if to pick them. In an instant he was at her side.

"Let me help you," he said.

She opened her little brownish palm, —

"Look!" In her hand were a few leaves of some herb. "It is for you."

Brace seized and kissed the hand.

"Is it some love-test?"

"It is for what you call a julep-cocktail," she replied gravely. "He will remain in a glass with aguardiente; you shall drink him with a straw. My sister has said that everywhere the Americans go they expect him to arrive."

"I prefer to take him straight," said Brace, laughing, as he nibbled a limp leaf bruised by the hand of the young girl. "He's pleasanter, and, on the whole, more wildly intoxicating this way! But what about your duenna? and how comes this blessed privilege of seeing you alone?"

Doña Isabel lifted her black eyes suddenly to Brace.

"You do not comprehend, then? Is it not, then, the custom of the Americans? Is it not, then, that there is no duenna in your country?"

"There are certainly no duennas in my country. But who has changed the custom here?"

"Is it not true that in your country any married woman shall duenna the young señorita?" continued Doña Isabel, without replying; "that any caballero and señorita shall see each other in the patio, and not under a balcony? — that they may speak with the lips, and not the fan?"

"Well — yes," said Brace.

"Then my brother has arranged it as so. He have much hear the Doña Barbara Brimmer when she make talk of these things frequently, and he is informed and impressed much. He will truly have that you will come of the corridor, and not the garden, for me, and that I shall have no duenna but the Doña Barbara. This does not make you happy, you American idiot boy!"

It did not. The thought of carrying on a flirtation under the fastidious Boston eye of Mrs. Brimmer, instead of under the discreet and mercenarily averted orbs of Doña Ursula, did not commend itself pleasantly to Brace.

"Oh, yes," he returned quickly. "We will go into the corridor, in the fashion of my country" —

"Yes," said Doña Isabel dubiously.

"*After* we have walked in the garden in the fashion of *yours*. That's only fair, is n't it?"

"Yes," said Doña Isabel gravely; "that's what the comandante will call 'international courtesy.'"

The young man slipped his arm around the young diplomatist's waist, and they walked on in decorous silence under the orange-trees.

"It seems to me," said Brace presently, "that Mrs. Brimmer has a good deal to say up your way?"

"Ah, yes; but what will you? It is my brother who has love for her."

"But," said Brace, stopping suddenly, "does n't he know that she has a husband living?"

Doña Isabel lifted her lashes in childlike wonder.

"Always! you idiot American boy. That is why. Ah, Mother of God! my brother is discreet. He is not a maniac, like you, to come after a silly muchacha like me."

The response which Brace saw fit to make to this statement elicited a sharp tap upon the knuckles from Doña Isabel.

"Tell to me," she said suddenly, "is not that a custom of your country?"

"What? *That?*"

"No, insensate. To attend a married señora?"

"Not openly."

"Ah, that is wrong," said Doña Isabel meditatively, moving the point of her tiny slipper on the gravel. "Then it is the young girl that shall come in the corridor and the married lady on the balcony?"

"Well, yes."

"Good-by, ape!"

She ran swiftly down the avenue of palms to a small door at the back of the house, turned, blew a kiss over the edge of her fan to Brace, and disappeared. He hesitated a moment or two, then quickly rescaling the wall, dropped into the lane outside, followed it to the gateway of the casa, and entered the patio as Doña Isabel decorously advanced from a darkened passage to the corridor. Although the hour of siesta had passed, her sister, Miss Chubb, the alcalde, and Mrs. Brimmer were still lounging here on sofas and hammocks.

It would have been difficult for a stranger at a first glance to discover the nationality of the ladies. Mrs. Brimmer and her friend Miss Chubb had entirely succumbed to the extreme dishabille of the Spanish toilet — not without a certain languid grace on the part of Mrs. Brimmer, whose easy contour lent itself to the stayless bodice; or a certain bashful, youthful naïveté on the part of Miss Chubb,

the rounded dazzling whiteness of whose neck and shoulders half pleased and half frightened her in her low, white, plain camisa — under the lace mantilla.

"It is *such* a pleasure to see you again, Mr. Brace," said Mrs. Brimmer, languidly observing the young man through the sticks of her fan; "I was telling Don Ramon that I feared Doña Ursula had frightened you away. I told him that your experience of American society might have caused you to misinterpret the habitual reserve of the Castilian," she continued, with the air of being already an alien of her own country, "and I should be only too happy to undertake the chaperoning of both these young ladies in their social relations with our friends. And how is dear Mr. Banks? and Mr. Crosby? whom I so seldom see now. I suppose, however, business has its superior attractions."

But Don Ramon, with impulsive gallantry, would not, — nay, *could* not — for a moment tolerate a heresy so alarming. It was simply wildly impossible. For why? In the presence of Doña Barbara — it exists not in the heart of man!

"*You* cannot, of course, conceive it, Don Ramon," said Mrs. Brimmer with an air of gentle suffering; "but I fear it is sadly true of the American gentlemen. They become too absorbed in their business. They forget their duty to our sex in their selfish devotion to affairs in which we are debarred from joining them, and yet they wonder that we prefer the society of men who are removed by birth, tradition, and position from this degrading kind of selfishness."

"But that was scarcely true of your own husband. *He* was not only a successful man in business, but we can see that he was equally successful in his relations to at least one of the fastidious sex," said Brace, maliciously glancing at Don Ramon.

Mrs. Brimmer received the innuendo with an invulnerable simplicity.

"Mr. Brimmer is, I am happy to say, *not* a business man. He entered into certain contracts having more or less of a political complexion, and carrying with them the genius but not the material results of trade. That he is not a business man — and a successful one — my position here at the present time is a sufficient proof," she said triumphantly. "And I must also protest," she added, with a faint sigh, "against Mr. Brimmer being spoken of in the past tense by anybody. It is painfully premature and ominous!"

She drew her mantilla across her shoulders with an expression of shocked sensitiveness which completed the humiliation of Brace and the subjugation of Don Ramon. But, unlike most of her sex, she was wise in the moment of victory. She cast a glance over her fan at Brace, and turned languidly to Doña Isabel.

"Mr. Brace must surely want some refreshment after his long ride. Why don't you seize this opportunity to show him the garden and let him select for himself the herbs he requires for that dreadful American drink; Miss Chubb and your sister will remain with me to receive the comandante's secretary and the doctor when they come."

"She 's more than my match," whispered Brace to Doña Isabel, as they left the corridor together. "I give in. I don't understand her: she frightens me."

"That is of your conscience! It is that you would understand the Doña Leonor — your dear Miss Keene — better! Ah! silence, imbecile! this Doña Barbara is even as thou art — a talking parrot. She will have that the comandante's secretary, Manuel, shall marry Mees Chubb, and that the doctor shall marry my sister. But she knows not that Manuel — listen so that you shall get sick at your heart and swallow your moustachio! — that Manuel loves the beautiful Leonor, and that Leonor loves not him, but Don Diego; and that my sister loathes the little doctor. And this Doña Barbara, that makes your liver white, would be

a feeder of chickens with such barley as this! Ah! come along!"

The arrival of the doctor and the comandante's secretary created another diversion, and the pairing off of the two couples indicated by Doña Isabel for a stroll in the garden, which was now beginning to recover from the still heat of midday. This left Don Ramon and Mrs. Brimmer alone in the corridor; Mrs. Brimmer's indefinite languor, generally accepted as some vague aristocratic condition of mind and body, not permitting her to join them.

There was a moment of dangerous silence; the voices of the young people were growing fainter in the distance. Mrs. Brimmer's eyes, in the shadow of her fan, were becoming faintly phosphorescent. Don Ramon's melancholy face, which had grown graver in the last few moments, approached nearer to her own.

"You are unhappy, Doña Barbara. The coming of this young cavalier, your countryman, revives your anxiety for your home. You are thinking of this husband who comes not. Is it not so?"

"I am thinking," said Mrs. Brimmer, with a sudden revulsion of solid Boston middle-class propriety, shown as much in the dry New England asperity of voice that stung even through her drawling of the Castilian speech, as in anything she said, — "I am thinking that, unless Mr. Brimmer comes soon, I and Miss Chubb shall have to abandon the hospitality of your house, Don Ramon. Without looking upon myself as a widow, or as indefinitely separated from Mr. Brimmer, the few words let fall by Mr. Brace show me what might be the feelings of my countrymen on the subject. However charming and considerate your hospitality has been — and I do not deny that it has been *most* grateful to *me* — I feel I cannot continue to accept it in those equivocal circumstances. I am speaking to a gentleman who, with the instincts and

chivalrous obligations of his order, must sympathize with my own delicacy in coming to this conclusion, and who will not take advantage of my confession that I do it with pain."

She spoke with a dry alacrity and precision so unlike her usual languor and the suggestions of the costume, and even the fan she still kept shading her faintly glowing eyes, that the man before her was more troubled by her manner than her words, which he had but imperfectly understood.

"You will leave here — this house ? " he stammered.

"It is necessary," she returned.

"But you shall listen to me first!" he said hurriedly. "Hear me, Doña Barbara — I have a secret — I will to you confess" —

"You must confess nothing," said Mrs. Brimmer, dropping her feet from the hammock, and sitting up primly, "I mean — nothing I may not hear."

The alcalde cast a look upon her at once blank and imploring.

"Ah, but you will hear," he said, after a pause. "There is a ship coming here. In two weeks she will arrive. None know it but myself, the comandante, and the padre. It is a secret of the government. She will come at night; she will depart in the morning, and no one else shall know. It has ever been that she brings no one to Todos Santos, that she takes no one from Todos Santos. That is the law. But I swear to you that she shall take you, your children, and your friend to Acapulco in secret, where you will be free. You will join your husband; you will be happy. I will remain, and I will die."

It would have been impossible for any woman but Mrs. Brimmer to have regarded the childlike earnestness and melancholy simplicity of this grown-up man without a pang. Even this superior woman experienced a sensible awkwardness as she slipped from the hammock and regained an upright position.

"Of course," she began, "your offer is exceedingly generous; and although I should not, perhaps, take a step of this kind without the sanction of Mr. Brimmer, and am not sure that he would not regard it as rash and premature, I will talk it over with Miss Chubb, for whom I am partially responsible. Nothing," she continued, with a sudden access of feeling, "would induce me, for any selfish consideration, to take any step that would imperil the future of that child, towards whom I feel as a sister." A slight suffusion glistened under her pretty brown lashes. "If anything should happen to her, I would never forgive myself; if I should be the unfortunate means of severing any ties that *she* may have formed, I could never look her in the face again. Of course, I can well understand that our presence here must be onerous to you, and that you naturally look forward to any sacrifice — even that of the interests of your country, and the defiance of its laws — to relieve you from a position so embarrassing as yours has become. I only trust, however, that the ill effects you allude to as likely to occur to yourself after our departure may be exaggerated by your sensitive nature. It would be an obligation added to the many that we owe you, which Mr. Brimmer would naturally find he could not return — and that, I can safely say, he would not hear of for a single moment."

While speaking, she had unconsciously laid aside her fan, lifted her mantilla from her head with both hands, and, drawing it around her shoulders and under her lifted chin, had crossed it over her bosom with a certain prim, automatic gesture, as if it had been the starched kerchief of some remote Puritan ancestress. With her arms still unconsciously crossed, she stooped rigidly, picked up her fan with three fingers, as if it had been a prayer-book, and, with a slight inclination of her bared head, with its accurately parted brown hair, passed slowly out of the corridor.

Astounded, bewildered, yet conscious of some vague wound, Don Ramon remained motionless, staring after her straight, retreating figure. Unable to follow closely either the meaning of her words or the logic of her reasoning, he nevertheless comprehended the sudden change in her manner, her voice, and the frigid resurrection of a nature he had neither known nor suspected. He looked blankly at the collapsed hammock, as if he expected to find in its depths those sinuous graces, languid fascinations, and the soft, half sensuous contour cast off by this vanishing figure of propriety.

In the eight months of their enforced intimacy and platonic seclusion he had learned to love this naïve, insinuating woman, whose frank simplicity seemed equal to his own, without thought of reserve, secrecy, or deceit. He had gradually been led to think of the absent husband with what he believed to be her own feelings — as of some impalpable, fleshless ancestor from whose remote presence she derived power, wealth, and importance, but to whom she owed only respect and certain obligations of honor equal to his own. He had never heard her speak of her husband with love, with sympathy, with fellowship, with regret. She had barely spoken of him at all, and then rather as an attractive factor in her own fascinations than a bar to a free indulgence in them. He was as little in her way as — his children. With what grace she had adapted herself to his — Don Ramon's — life — she who frankly confessed she had no sympathy with her husband's! With what languid enthusiasm she had taken up the customs of *his* country, while deploring the habits of her own! With what goddess-like indifference she had borne this interval of waiting! And yet this woman — who had seemed the embodiment of romance — had received the announcement of his sacrifice — the only revelation he allowed himself to make of his

hopeless passion — with the frigidity of a duenna! Had he wounded her in some other unknown way? Was she mortified that he had not first declared his passion — he who had never dared to speak to her of love before? Perhaps she even doubted it! In his ignorance of the world he had, perhaps, committed some grave offense! He should not have let her go! He should have questioned, implored her — thrown himself at her feet! Was it too late yet?

He passed hurriedly into the formal little drawing-room, whose bizarre coloring was still darkened by the closed blinds and dropped awnings that had shut out the heat of day. She was not there. He passed the open door of her room; it was empty. At the end of the passage a faint light stole from a door opening into the garden that was still ajar. She must have passed out that way. He opened it, and stepped out into the garden.

The sound of voices beside a ruined fountain a hundred yards away indicated the vicinity of the party; but a single glance showed him that she was not among them. So much the better — he would find her alone. Cautiously slipping beside the wall of the house, under the shadow of a creeper, he gained the long avenue without attracting attention. She was not there. Had she effectively evaded contact with the others by leaving the garden through the little gate in the wall that entered the Mission inclosure? It was partly open, as if some one had just passed through. He followed, took a few steps, and stopped abruptly. In the shadow of one of the old pear-trees a man and woman were standing. An impulse of wild jealousy seized him; he was about to leap forward, but the next moment the measured voice of the comandante, addressing Mrs. Markham, fell upon his ear. He drew back with a sudden flush upon his face. The comandante of Todos Santos, in grave, earnest accents, was actually offering to Mrs. Markham the

same proposal that he, Don Ramon, had made to Mrs. Brimmer but a moment ago!

"No one," said the comandante sententiously, "will know it but myself. You will leave the ship at Acapulco; you will rejoin your husband in good time; you will be happy, my child; you will forget the old man who drags out the few years of loneliness still left to him in Todos Santos."

Forgetting himself, Don Ramon leaned breathlessly forward to hear Mrs. Markham's reply. Would she answer the comandante as Doña Barbara had answered *him?* Her words rose distinctly in the evening air.

"You 're a gentleman, Don Miguel Briones; and the least respect I can show a man of your kind is not to pretend that I don't understand the sacrifice you 're making. I shall always remember it as about the biggest compliment I ever received, and the biggest risk that any man — except one — ever ran for me. But as the man who ran that bigger risk is n't here to speak for himself, and generally trusts his wife, Susan Markham, to speak for him — it 's all the same as if *he* thanked you. There 's my hand, Don Miguel: shake it. Well — if you prefer it — kiss it then. There — don't be a fool — but let 's go back to Miss Keene."

CHAPTER IV

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

WHILE these various passions had been kindled by her compatriots in the peaceful ashes of Todos Santos, Eleanor Keene had moved among them indifferently and, at times, unconsciously. The stranding of her young life on that unknown shore had not drawn her towards her fellow-exiles, and the circumstances which afterwards separated her from daily contact with them completed the social estrangement. She found herself more in sympathy with the natives, to whom she had shown no familiarity, than with her own people, who had mixed with them more or less contemptuously. She found the naïveté of Doña Isabel more amusing than the doubtful simplicity of that married ingénue Mrs. Brimmer, although she still met the young girl's advances with a certain reserve. She found herself often pained by the practical brusqueness with which Mrs. Markham put aside the comandante's delicate attentions, and she was moved with a strange pity for his childlike trustfulness, which she knew was hopeless. As the months passed, on the few occasions that she still met the Excelsior's passengers she was surprised to find how they had faded from her memory, and to discover in them the existence of qualities that made her wonder how she could have ever been familiar with them. She reproached herself with this fickleness; she wondered if she would have felt thus if they had completed their voyage to San Francisco together; and she recalled, with a sad smile, the enthusiastic plans they had formed during the passage to perpetuate their fellowship by

anniversaries and festivals. But she at last succumbed, and finally accepted their open alienation as preferable to the growing awkwardness of their chance encounters.

For a few weeks following the flight of Captain Bunker and her acceptance of the hospitality and protection of the council, she became despondent. The courage that had sustained her, and the energy she had shown in the first days of their abandonment, suddenly gave way, for no apparent reason. She bitterly regretted the brother whom she scarcely remembered; she imagined his suspense and anguish on her account, and suffered for both; she felt the dumb pain of homesickness for a home she had never known. Her loneliness became intolerable. Her condition at last affected Mrs. Markham, whose own idleness had been beguiled by writing to her husband an exhaustive account of her captivity, which had finally swelled to a volume on Todos Santos, its resources, inhabitants, and customs. "Good heavens!" she said, "you must do something, child, to occupy your mind — if it is only a flirtation with that conceited secretary." But this terrible alternative was happily not required. The comandante had still retained as part of the old patriarchal government of the Mission the Presidio school, for the primary instruction of the children of the soldiers, — dependants of the garrison. Miss Keene, fascinated by several little pairs of beady black eyes that had looked up trustingly to hers from the playground on the glacis, offered to teach English to the comandante's flock. The offer was submitted to the spiritual head of Todos Santos, and full permission given by Padre Esteban to the fair heretic. Singing was added to the instruction, and in a few months the fame of the gracious Doña Leonor's pupils stirred to emulation even the boy choristers of the Mission.

Her relations with James Hurlstone during this interval were at first marked by a strange and unreasonable reserve.

Whether she resented the singular coalition forced upon them by the council and felt the awkwardness of their unintentional imposture when they met, she did not know, but she generally avoided his society. This was not difficult, as he himself had shown no desire to intrude his confidences upon her; and even in her shyness she could not help thinking that if he had treated the situation lightly or humorously — as she felt sure Mr. Brace or Mr. Crosby would have done — it would have been less awkward and unpleasant. But his gloomy reserve seemed to the high-spirited girl to color their innocent partnership with the darkness of conspiracy.

"If your conscience troubles you, Mr. Hurlstone, in regard to the wretched infatuation of those people," she had once said, "undeceive them, if you can, and I will assist you. And don't let that affair of Captain Bunker worry you either. I have already confessed to the comandante that he escaped through my carelessness."

"You could not have done otherwise without sacrificing the poor secretary, who must have helped you," Hurlstone returned quietly.

Miss Keene bit her lip and dropped the subject. At their next meeting Hurlstone himself resumed it.

"I hope you don't allow that absurd decree of the council to disturb you; I imagine they 're quite convinced of their folly. I know where the padre is; and I know that he thinks you 've earned a right to the gratitude of the council in your gracious task at the Presidio school that is far beyond any fancied political service."

"I really have n't thought about it at all," said Miss Keene coolly. "I thought it was *you* who were annoyed."

"I? not at all," returned Hurlstone quickly. "I have been able to assist the padre in arranging the ecclesiastical archives of the church, and in suggesting some improvement

in codifying the ordinances of the last forty years. No; I believe I 'm earning my living here, and I fancy they think so."

"Then it is n't *that* that troubles you?" said Miss Keene carelessly, but glancing at him under the shade of her lashes.

"No," he said coldly, turning away.

Yet unsatisfactory as these brief interviews were, they revived in Miss Keene the sympathizing curiosity and interest she had always felt for this singular man, and which had been only held in abeyance at the beginning of their exile; in fact, she found herself thinking of him more during the interval when they seldom saw each other, and apparently had few interests in common, than when they were together on the Excelsior. Gradually she slipped into three successive phases of feeling towards him, each of them marked with an equal degree of peril to her peace of mind. She began with a profound interest in the mystery of his secluded habits, his strange abstraction, and a recognition of the evident superiority of a nature capable of such deep feeling — uninfluenced by those baser distractions which occupied Brace, Crosby, and Winslow. This phase passed into a settled conviction that some woman was at the root of his trouble, and responsible for it. With an instinctive distrust of her own sex, she was satisfied that it must be either a misplaced or unworthy attachment, and that the unknown woman was to blame. This second phase — which hovered between compassion and resentment — suddenly changed to the latter — the third phase of her feelings. Miss Keene became convinced that Mr. Hurlstone had a settled aversion to *herself*. Why and wherefore, she did not attempt to reason, yet she was satisfied that from the first he disliked her. His studious reserve on the Excelsior, compared with the attentions of the others, ought then to have convinced her of the fact; and there was no doubt

now that his present discontent could be traced to the unfortunate circumstances that brought them together. Having given herself up to that idea, she vacillated between a strong impulse to inform him that she knew his real feelings and an equally strong instinct to avoid him hereafter entirely. The result was a feeble compromise. On the ground that Mr. Hurlstone could "scarcely be expected to admire her inferior performances," she declined to invite him with Father Esteban to listen to her pupils. Father Esteban took a large pinch of snuff, examined Miss Keene attentively, and smiled a sad smile. The next day he begged Hurlstone to take a volume of old music to Miss Keene with his compliments. Hurlstone did so, and for some reason exerted himself to be agreeable. As he made no allusion to her rudeness, she presumed he did not know of it, and speedily forgot it herself. When he suggested a return visit to the boy choir, with whom he occasionally practiced, she blushed, and feared she had scarcely the time. But she came with Mrs. Markham, some consciousness, and a visible color!

And then, almost without her knowing how or why, and entirely unexpected and unheralded, came a day so strangely and unconsciously happy, so innocently sweet and joyous, that it seemed as if all the other days of her exile had only gone before to create it, and as if it — and it alone — were a sufficient reason for her being there. A day full of gentle intimations, laughing suggestions, childlike surprises and awakenings; a day delicious for the very incompleteness of its vague happiness. And this remarkable day was simply marked in Mrs. Markham's diary as follows: "Went with E. to Indian village; met padre and J. H. J. H. actually left shell and crawled on beach with E. E. chatty."

The day itself had been singularly quiet and gracious, even for that rare climate of balmy days and recuperating

nights. At times the slight breath of the sea which usually stirred the morning air of Todos Santos was suspended, and a hush of expectation seemed to arrest land and water. When Miss Keene and Mrs. Markham left the Presidio, the tide was low, and their way lay along the beach past the Mission walls. A walk of two or three miles brought them to the Indian village — properly a suburban quarter of Todos Santos — a collection of adobe huts and rudely cultivated fields. Padre Esteban and Mr. Hurlstone were awaiting them in the palm-thatched veranda of a more pretentious cabin, that served as a school-room. "This is Don Diego's design," said the padre, beaming with a certain paternal pride on Hurlstone, "built by himself and helped by the heathen; but look you: my gentleman is not satisfied with it, and wishes now to bring his flock to the Mission school, and have them mingle with the pure-blooded races on an equality. That is the revolutionary idea of this *sans culotte* reformer," continued the good Father, shaking his yellow finger with gentle archness at the young man. "Ah, we shall yet have a revolution in Todos Santos unless you ladies take him in hand. He has already brought the half-breeds over to his side, and those heathens follow him like dumb cattle anywhere. There, take him away and scold him, Doña Leonor, while I speak to the Señora Markham of the work that her good heart and skillful fingers may do for my poor muchachos."

Eleanor Keene lifted her beautiful eyes to Hurlstone with an artless tribute in their depths that brought the blood faintly into his cheek. She was not thinking of the priest's admonishing words; she was thinking of the quiet, unselfish work that this gloomy misanthrope had been doing while his companions had been engaged in lower aims and listless pleasures, and while she herself had been aimlessly fretting and diverting herself. What were her few hours of applauded instruction with pretty Murillo-like children

of the Fort compared to his silent and unrecognized labor! Yet even at this moment an uneasy doubt crossed her mind.

"I suppose Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb interest themselves greatly in your — in the padre's charities?"

The first playful smile she had seen on Hurlstone's face lightened in his eyes and lips, and was becoming.

"I am afraid my barbarians are too low and too near home for Mrs. Brimmer's missionary zeal. She and Miss Chubb patronize the Mexican school with cast-off dresses, old bonnets retrimmed, flannel petticoats, some old novels and books of poetry — of which the padre makes an auto-da-fé — and their own patronizing presence on fête days. Providence has given them the vague impression that leprosy and contagious skin-disease are a peculiarity of the southern aborigine, and they have left me severely alone."

"I wish you would prevail upon the padre to let *me* help you," said Miss Keene, looking down.

"But you already have the commander's chickens — which you are bringing up as swans, by the way," said Hurlstone mischievously. "You would n't surely abandon the nest again?"

"You are laughing at me," said Miss Keene, putting on a slight pout to hide the vague pleasure that Hurlstone's gayer manner was giving her. "But, really, I've been thinking that the Presidio children are altogether too pretty and picturesque for me, and that I enjoy them too much to do them any good. It 's like playing with them, you know!"

Hurlstone laughed, but suddenly looking down upon her face he was struck with its youthfulness. She had always impressed him before — through her reserve and independence — as older, and more matured in character. He did not know how lately she was finding her lost youth as he asked her, quite abruptly, if she ever had any little brothers and sisters.

The answer to this question involved the simple story

of Miss Keene's life, which she gave with naïve detail. She told him of her early childhood, and the brother who was only an indistinct memory; of her school-days, and her friendships up to the moment of her first step into the great world that was so strangely arrested at Todos Santos. He was touched with the almost pathetic blankness of this virgin page. Encouraged by his attention, and perhaps feeling a sympathy she had lately been longing for, she confessed to him the thousand little things which she had reserved from even Mrs. Markham during her first apathetic weeks at Todos Santos.

"I 'm sure I should have been much happier if I had had any one to talk to," she added, looking up into his face with a naïveté of faint reproach; "it 's very different for men, you know. They can always distract themselves with something. Although," she continued hesitatingly, "I 've sometimes thought *you* would have been happier if you had had somebody to tell your troubles to — I don't mean the padre; for, good as he is, he is a foreigner, you know, and would n't look upon things as *we* do — but some one in sympathy with you."

She stopped, alarmed at the change of expression in his face. A quick flush had crossed his cheek; for an instant he had looked suspiciously into her questioning eyes. But the next moment the idea of his quietly selecting this simple, unsophisticated girl as the confidant of his miserable marriage, and the desperation that had brought him there, struck him as being irresistibly ludicrous; and he smiled. It was the first time that the habitual morbid intensity of his thoughts on that one subject had ever been disturbed by reaction; it was the first time that a clear ray of reason had pierced the gloom in which he had enwrapped it. Seeing him smile, the young girl smiled too. Then they smiled together vaguely and sympathetically, as over some unspoken confidence. But, unknown and unsuspected by

himself, that smile had completed his emancipation and triumph. The next moment, when he sought with a conscientious sigh to reënter his old mood, he was half shocked to find it gone. Whatever gradual influence — the outcome of these few months of rest and repose — may have already been at work to dissipate his clouded fancy, he was only vaguely conscious that the laughing breath of the young girl had blown it away forever.

The perilous point passed, unconsciously to both of them, they fell into freer conversation, tacitly avoiding the subject of Mr. Hurlstone's past reserve only as being less interesting. Hurlstone did not return Miss Keene's confidences — not because he wished to deceive her, but that he preferred to entertain her; while she did not care to know his secret now that it no longer affected their sympathy in other things. It was a pleasant, innocent selfishness, that, however, led them along, step by step, to more uncertain and difficult ground.

In their idle, happy walk they had strayed towards the beach, and had come upon a large stone cross with its base half hidden in sand, and covered with small tenacious, sweet-scented creepers, bearing a pale lilac blossom that exhaled a mingled odor of sea and shore. Hurlstone pointed out the cross as one of the earliest outposts of the Church on the edge of the unclaimed heathen wilderness. It was hung with strings of gaudy shells and feathers, which Hurlstone explained were votive offerings in which their pagan superstitions still mingled with their new faith.

"I don't like to worry that good old padre," he continued, with a light smile, "but I'm afraid that they prefer this cross to the chapel for certain heathenish reasons of their own. I am quite sure that they still hold some obscure rites here under the good father's very nose, and that, in the guise of this emblem of our universal faith, they worship some deity we have no knowledge of."

"It 's a shame," said Miss Keene quickly.

To her surprise, Hurlstone did not appear so shocked as she, in her belief of his religious sympathy with the padre, had imagined.

"They 're a harmless race," he said carelessly. "The place is much frequented by the children — especially the young girls; a good many of these offerings came from them."

The better to examine these quaint tributes, Miss Keene had thrown herself, with an impulsive, girlish abandonment, on the mound by the cross, and Hurlstone sat down beside her. Their eyes met in an innocent pleasure of each other's company. She thought him very handsome in the dark, half official Mexican dress that necessity alone had obliged him to assume, and much more distinguished-looking than his companions in their extravagant foppery; he thought her beauty more youthful and artless than he had imagined it to be, and with his older and graver experiences felt a certain protecting superiority that was pleasant and reassuring.

Nevertheless, seated so near each other, they were very quiet. Hurlstone could not tell whether it was the sea or the flowers, but the dress of the young girl seemed to exhale some subtle perfume of her own freshness that half took away his breath. She had scraped up a handful of sand, and was allowing it to escape through her slim fingers in a slender rain on the ground. He was watching the operation with what he began to fear was fatuous imbecility.

"Miss Keene? — I beg your pardon" —

"Mr. Hurlstone? — Excuse me, you were saying" —

They had both spoken at the same moment, and smiled forgivingly at each other. Hurlstone gallantly insisted upon the precedence of her thought — the scamp had doubted the coherency of his own.

"I used to think," she began — "you won't be angry, will you?"

"Decidedly not."

"I used to think you had an idea of becoming a priest."

"Why?"

"Because — you are sure you won't be angry — because I thought you hated women!"

"Father Esteban is a priest," said Hurlstone, with a faint smile, "and you know he thinks kindly of your sex."

"Yes; but perhaps *his* life was never spoiled by some wicked woman — like — like yours."

For an instant he gazed intently into her eyes.

"Who told you that?"

"No one."

She was evidently speaking the absolute truth. There was no deceit or suppression in her clear gaze; if anything, only the faintest look of wonder at his astonishment. And he — this jealously guarded secret, the curse of his whole wretched life, had been guessed by this simple girl, without comment, without reserve, without horror! And there had been no scene, no convulsion of Nature, no tragedy; he had not thrown himself into yonder sea; she had not fled from him shrinking, but was sitting there opposite to him in gentle smiling expectation, the golden light of Todos Santos around them, a bit of bright ribbon shining in her dark hair, and he, miserable, outcast, and recluse, had not even changed his position, but was looking up without tremulousness or excitement, and smiling, too.

He raised himself suddenly on his knee.

"And what if it were all true?" he demanded.

"I should be very sorry for you, and glad it were all over now," she said softly.

A faint pink flush covered her cheek the next moment, as if she had suddenly become aware of another meaning in her speech, and she turned her head hastily towards the

village. To her relief she discerned that a number of Indian children had approached them from behind and had halted a few paces from the cross. Their hands were full of flowers and shells as they stood hesitatingly watching the couple.

"They are some of the school-children," said Hurlstone, in answer to her inquiring look; "but I can't understand why they come here so openly."

"Oh, don't scold them!" said Eleanor, forgetting her previous orthodox protest; "let us go away, and pretend we don't notice them."

But as she was about to rise to her feet the hesitation of the little creatures ended in a sudden advance of the whole body, and before she comprehended what they were doing they had pressed the whole of their floral tributes in her lap. The color rose again quickly to her laughing face as she looked at Hurlstone.

"Do you usually get up this pretty surprise for visitors?" she said hesitatingly.

"I assure you I have nothing to do with it," he answered, with frank amazement; "it's quite spontaneous. And look — they are even decorating *me*."

It was true; they had thrown a half dozen strings of shells on Hurlstone's unresisting shoulders, and, unheeding the few words he laughingly addressed them in their own dialect, they ran off a few paces, and remained standing, as if gravely contemplating their work. Suddenly, with a little outcry of terror, they turned, fled wildly past them, and disappeared in the bushes.

Miss Keene and Hurlstone rose at the same moment, but the young girl, taking a step forward, suddenly staggered, and was obliged to clasp one of the arms of the cross to keep herself from falling. Hurlstone sprang to her side.

"Are you ill?" he asked hurriedly. "You are quite white. What is the matter?"

A smile crossed her colorless face.

"I am certainly very giddy; everything seems to tremble."

"Perhaps it is the flowers," he said anxiously. "Their heavy perfume in this close air affects you. Throw them away, for Heaven's sake!"

But she clutched them tighter to her heart as she leaned for a moment, pale yet smiling, against the cross.

"No, no!" she said earnestly; "it was not that. But the children were frightened, and their alarm terrified me. There, it is over now."

She let him help her to her seat again as he glanced hurriedly around him. It must have been sympathy with her, for he was conscious of a slight vertigo himself. The air was very close and still. Even the pleasant murmur of the waves had ceased.

"How very low the tide is!" said Eleanor Keene, resting her elbow on her knees and her round chin upon her hand. "I wonder if that could have frightened those dear little midgets?" The tide, in fact, had left the shore quite bare and muddy for nearly a quarter of a mile to seaward.

Hurlstone arose, with grave eyes, but a voice that was unchanged.

"Suppose we inquire? Lean on my arm, and we'll go up the hill towards the Mission garden. Bring your flowers with you."

The color had quite returned to her cheeks as she leant on his proffered arm. Yet perhaps she was really weaker than she knew, for he felt the soft pressure of her hand and the gentle abandonment of her figure against his own as they moved on. But for some preoccupying thought, he might have yielded more completely to the pleasure of that innocent contact and have drawn her closer towards him; yet they moved steadily on, he contenting himself from

time to time with a hurried glance at the downcast fringes of the eyes beside him. Presently he stopped, his attention disturbed by what appeared to be the fluttering of a black-winged, red-crested bird, in the bushes before him. The next moment he discovered it to be the rose-covered head of Doña Isabel, who was running towards them. Eleanor withdrew her arm from Hurlstone's.

"Ah, imbecile!" said Doña Isabel, pouncing upon Eleanor Keene like an affectionate panther. "They have said you were on the seashore, and I fly for you as a bird. Tell to me quick," she whispered, hastily putting her own little brown ear against Miss Keene's mouth, "*immediatamente*, are you much happy?"

"Where is Mr. Brace?" said Miss Keene, trying to effect a diversion, as she laughed and struggled to get free from her tormentor.

"He, the idiot boy! Naturally, when he is for use, he comes not. But as a manaic — ever! I would that I have him no more. You will to me presently give your — brother! I have since to-day a *presentimiento* that him I shall love! Ah!"

She pressed her little brown fist, still tightly clutching her fan, against her low bodice, as if already transfixed with a secret and absorbing passion.

"Well, you shall have Dick then," said Miss Keene, laughing; "but was it for *that* you were seeking me?"

"Mother of God! you know not then what has happened? You are a blind — a deaf — to but one thing all the time? Ah!" she said quickly, unfolding her fan and modestly diving her little head behind it, "I have ashamed for you, Miss Keene."

"But *what* has happened?" said Hurlstone, interposing to relieve his companion. "We fancied something" —

"Something! he says something! — ah, that something

was a *temblor!* An earthquake! The earth has shaken himself. Look!"

She pointed with her fan to the shore, where the sea had suddenly returned in a turbulence of foam and billows that was breaking over the base of the cross they had just quitted.

Miss Keene drew a quick sigh. Doña Isabel had ducked again modestly behind her fan, but this time dragging with her other arm Miss Keene's head down to share its discreet shadow as she whispered, —

"And — infatuated one! — you two never noticed it!"

CHAPTER V

CLOUDS AND CHANGE

THE earthquake shock, although the first experienced by the Americans, had been a yearly phenomenon to the people of Todos Santos, and was so slight as to leave little impression upon either the low adobe walls of the pueblo or the indolent population. "If it 's a provision of Nature for shaking up these Rip Van Winkle Latin races now and then, it 's a dead failure, as far as Todos Santos is concerned," Crosby had said, with a yawn. "Brace, who 's got geology on the brain ever since he struck cinnabar ore, says he is n't sure the Injins ain't right when they believe that the Pacific Ocean used to roll straight up to the Presidio, and there was n't any channel — and that reef of rocks was upheaved in their time. But what 's the use of it? it never really waked them up." "Perhaps they 're waiting for another kind of earthquake," Winslow had responded sententiously.

In six weeks it had been forgotten, except by three people — Miss Keene, James Hurlstone, and Padre Esteban. Since Hurlstone had parted with Miss Keene on that memorable afternoon he had apparently lapsed into his former reserve. Without seeming to avoid her timid advances, he met her seldom, and then only in the presence of the padre or Mrs. Markham. Although uneasy at the deprivation of his society, his present shyness did not affect her as it had done at first: she knew it was no longer indifference; she even fancied she understood it from what had been her own feelings. If he no longer raised his eyes

to hers as frankly as he had that day, she felt a more delicate pleasure in the consciousness of his lowered eyelids when they met, and the instinct that told her when his melancholy glance followed her unobserved. The sex of these lovers — if we may call them so who had never exchanged a word of love — seemed to be changed. It was Miss Keene who now sought him with a respectful and frank admiration; it was Hurlstone who now tried to avoid it with a feminine dread of reciprocal display. Once she had even adverted to the episode of the cross. They were standing under the arch of the refectory door, waiting for Padre Esteban, and looking towards the sea.

"Do you think we were ever in any real danger, down there, on the shore — that day?" she said timidly.

"No; not from the sea," he replied, looking at her with a half defiant resolution.

"From what, then?" she asked, with a naïveté that was yet a little conscious.

"Do you remember the children giving you their offerings that day?" he asked abruptly.

"I do," she replied, with smiling eyes.

"Well, it appears that it is the custom for the betrothed couples to come to the cross to exchange their vows. They mistook us for lovers."

All the instinctive delicacy of Miss Keene's womanhood resented the rude infelicity of this speech and the flippant manner of its utterance. She did not blush, but lifted her clear eyes calmly to his.

"It was an unfortunate mistake," she said coldly, "the more so as they were your pupils. Ah! here is Father Esteban," she added, with a marked tone of relief, as she crossed over to the priest's side.

When Father Esteban returned to the refectory that evening, Hurlstone was absent. When it grew later, becoming uneasy, the good father sought him in the garden.

At the end of the avenue of pear-trees there was a break in the sea-wall, and here, with his face to the sea, Hurlstone was leaning gloomily. Father Esteban's tread was noiseless, and he had laid his soft hand on the young man's shoulder before Hurlstone was aware of his presence. He started slightly; his gloomy eyes fell before the priest's.

"My son," said the old man gravely, "this must go on no longer."

"I don't understand you," Hurlstone replied coldly.

"Do not try to deceive yourself, nor me. Above all, do not try to deceive *her*. Either you are or are not in love with this countrywoman of yours. If you are not, my respect for her and my friendship for you prompts me to save you both from a foolish intimacy that may ripen into a misplaced affection; if you are already in love with her" —

"I have never spoken a word of love to her!" interrupted Hurlstone quickly. "I have even tried to avoid her since" —

"Since you found that you loved her! Ah, foolish boy! and you think that because the lips speak not, the passions of the heart are stilled! Do you think your silence in her presence is not a protestation that she, even she, child as she is, can read, with the cunning of her sex?"

"Well — if I am in love with her, what then?" said Hurlstone doggedly. "It is no crime to love a pure and simple girl. Am I not free? You yourself, in yonder church, told me" —

"Silence, Diego," said the priest sternly. "Silence, before you utter the thought that shall disgrace you to speak and me to hear!"

"Forgive me, Father Esteban," said the young man hurriedly, grasping both hands of the priest. "Forgive me — I am mad — distracted — but I swear to you I only meant" —

"Hush!" interrupted the priest more gently. "So; that will do." He stopped, drew out his snuff-box, rapped the lid, and took a pinch of snuff slowly. "We will not recur to that point. Then you have told her the story of your life?"

"No; but I will. She shall know all — everything — before I utter a word of love to her."

"Ah! bueno! muy bueno!" said the padre, wiping his nose ostentatiously. "Ah! let me see! Then, when we have shown her that we cannot possibly marry her, we will begin to make love to her! Eh, eh! that is the American fashion. Ah, pardon!" he continued, in response to a gesture of protestation from Hurlstone; "I am wrong. It is when we have told her that we cannot marry her as a Protestant, that we will make love as a Catholic. Is that it?"

"Hear me," said Hurlstone passionately. "You have saved me from madness and perhaps death. Your care — your kindness — your teachings have given me life again. Don't blame me, Father Esteban, if, in casting off my old self, you have given me hopes of a new and fresher life — of" —

"A newer and fresher love, you would say," said the padre, with a sad smile. "Be it so. You will at least do justice to the old priest, when you remember that he never pressed you to take vows that would have prevented this forever."

"I know it," said Hurlstone, taking the old man's hand. "And you will remember, too, that I was happy and contented before this came upon me. Tell me what I shall do. Be my guide — my friend, Father Esteban. Put me where I was a few months ago — before I learned to love her."

"Do you mean it, Diego?" said the old man, grasping his hand tightly, and fixing his eyes upon him.

"I do."

"Then listen to me, for it is my turn to speak. When,

eight months ago, you sought the shelter of that blessed roof, it was for refuge from a woman that had cursed your life. It was given you. You would leave it now to commit an act that would bring another woman, as mad as yourself, clamoring at its doors for protection from *you*. For what you are proposing to this innocent girl is what you accepted from the older and wickeder woman. You have been cursed because a woman divided for you what was before God an indivisible right; and you, Diego, would now redivide that with another, whom you dare to say you *love!* You would use the opportunity of her helplessness and loneliness here to convince her; you would tempt her with sympathy, for she is unhappy; with companionship, for she has no longer the world to choose from — with everything that should make her sacred from your pursuit."

"Enough," said Hurlstone hoarsely; "say no more. Only I implore you tell me what to do now to save her. I will — if you tell me to do it — leave her forever."

"Why should *you* go?" said the priest quietly. "*Her* absence will be sufficient."

"*Her* absence?" echoed Hurlstone.

"Hers alone. The conditions that brought *you* here are unchanged. You are still in need of an asylum from the world and the wife you have repudiated. Why should you abandon it? For the girl, there is no cause why she should remain — beyond yourself. She has a brother whom she loves — who wants her — who has the right to claim her at any time. She will go to him."

"But how?"

"That has been my secret, and will be my sacrifice to you, Diego, my son. I have foreseen all this; I have expected it from the day that girl sent you her woman's message, that was half a challenge, from her school — I have known it from the day you walked together on the seashore. I was blind before that — for I am weak in my way,

too, and I had dreamed of other things. God has willed it otherwise." He paused, and, returning the pressure of Hurlstone's hand, went on. "My secret and my sacrifice for you is this. For the last two hundred years the Church has had a secret and trusty messenger from the See at Guadalajara — in a ship that touches here for a few hours only every three years. Her arrival and departure is known only to myself and my brothers of the council. By this wisdom and the provision of God, the integrity of the Holy Church and the conversion of the heathen have been maintained without interruption and interference. You know now, my son, why your comrades were placed under surveillance; why it was necessary that the people should believe in a political conspiracy among yourselves, rather than the facts as they existed, which might have bred a dangerous curiosity among them. I have given you our secret, Diego — that is but a part of my sacrifice. When that ship arrives, and she is expected daily, I will secretly place Miss Keene and her friend on board, with explanatory letters to the archbishop, and she will be assisted to rejoin her brother. It will be against the wishes of the council; but my will," continued the old man, with a gesture of imperiousness, "is the will of the Church, and the law that overrides all."

He had stopped, with a strange fire in his eyes. It still continued to burn as he went on rapidly, —

"You will understand the sacrifice I am making in telling you this, when you know that I could have done all that I propose without your leave or hindrance. Yes, Diego; I had but to stretch out my hand thus, and that foolish firebrand of a heretic muchacha would have vanished from Todos Santos forever. I could have left you in your fool's paradise, and one morning you would have found her gone. I should have condoled with you, and consoled you, and you would have forgotten her as you did the other. I should not have hesitated; it is the right of

the Church through all time to break through those carnal ties without heed of the suffering flesh, and I ought to have done so. This, and this alone, would have been worthy of Las Casas and Junipero Serra! But I am weak and old — I am no longer fit for His work. Far better that the ship which takes her away should bring back my successor and one more worthy Todos Santos than I."

He stopped, his eyes dimmed, he buried his face in his hands.

"You have done right, Father Esteban," said Hurlstone, gently putting his arm round the priest's shoulders, "and I swear to you your secret is as safe as if you had never revealed it to me. Perhaps," he added, with a sigh, "I should have been happier if I had not known it — if she had passed out of my life as mysteriously as she had entered it; but you will try to accept my sacrifice as some return for yours. I shall see her no more."

"But will you swear it?" said the priest eagerly. "Will you swear that you will not even seek her to say farewell? for in that moment the wretched girl may shake your resolution."

"I shall not see her," repeated the young man slowly.

"But if she asks an interview," persisted the priest, "on the pretense of having your advice?"

"She will not," returned Hurlstone, with a half bitter recollection of their last parting. "You do not know her pride."

"Perhaps," said the priest musingly. "But I have *your* word, Diego. And now let us return to the Mission, for there is much to prepare, and you shall assist me."

Meantime, Hurlstone was only half right in his estimate of Miss Keene's feelings, although the result was the same. The first shock to her delicacy in his abrupt speech had been succeeded by a renewal of her uneasiness concerning his past life or history. While she would, in her unselfish

attachment for him, have undoubtedly accepted any explanation he might have chosen to give her, his continued reserve and avoidance of her left full scope to her imaginings. Rejecting any hypothesis of his history except that of some unfortunate love episode, she began to think that perhaps he still loved this nameless woman. Had anything occurred to renew his affection? It was impossible, in their isolated condition, that he would hear from her. But perhaps the priest might have been a confidant of his past, and had recalled the old affection in rivalry of her? Or had she herself been unfortunate through any idle word to reopen the wound? Had there been any suggestion? — she checked herself suddenly at a thought that benumbed and chilled her! — perhaps that happy hour at the cross might have reminded him of some episode with another? That was the real significance of his rude speech. With this first taste of the poison of jealousy upon her virgin lips, she seized the cup and drank it eagerly. Ah, well — he should keep his blissful recollections of the past undisturbed by her. Perhaps he might even see — though *she* had no past — that her present life might be as disturbing to him! She recalled, with a foolish pleasure, his solitary faint sneer at the devotion of the commander's secretary. Why should n't she, hereafter, encourage that devotion as well as that sneer from this complacently beloved Mr. Hurlstone? Why should he be so assured of her past? The fair and gentle reader who may be shocked at this revelation of Eleanor Keene's character will remember that she has not been recorded as an angel in these pages, but as a very human, honest, inexperienced girl, for the first time struggling with the most diplomatic, Machiavellian, and hypocritical of all the passions.

In pursuance of this new resolution, she determined to accept an invitation from Mrs. Markham to accompany her and the commander to a reception at the alcalde's house

— the happy secretary being of the party. Mrs. Markham, who was under promise to the comandante not to reveal his plan for the escape of herself and Miss Keene until the arrival of the expected transport, had paid little attention to the late vagaries of her friend, and had contented herself by once saying, with a marked emphasis, that the more free they kept themselves from any entanglements with other people, the more prepared they would be for *a change*.

"Perhaps it's just as well not to be too free, even with those Jesuits over at the Mission. Your brother, you know, might not like it."

"*Those Jesuits!*" repeated Miss Keene indignantly. "Father Esteban, to begin with, is a Franciscan, and Mr. Hurlstone is as orthodox as you or I."

"Don't be too sure of that, my dear," returned Mrs. Markham sententiously. "Heaven only knows what disguises they assume. Why, Hurlstone and the priest are already as thick as two peas; and you can't make me believe they didn't know of each other before we came here. He was the first one ashore, you remember, before the mutiny; and where did he turn up? — at the Mission, of course! And have you forgotten that sleep-walking affair — all Jesuitical! Why, poor dear Markham used to say we were surrounded by ramifications of that society — everywhere. The very waiter at your hotel table might belong to the Order."

The hour of the siesta was just past, and the corridor and gardens of the alcalde's house were grouped with friends and acquaintances as the party from the Presidio entered. Mrs. Brimmer, who had apparently effected a temporary compromise with her late instincts of propriety, was still doing the honors of the alcalde's house, and had once more assumed the Mexican dishabille, even to the slight exposure of her small feet, stockingless, in white satin slippers. The presence of the comandante and his

secretary guaranteed the two ladies of their party a reception at least faultless in form and respect, whatever may have been the secret feelings of the hostess and her friends. The alcalde received Mrs. Markham and Miss Keene with unruffled courtesy, and conducted them to the place of honor beside him.

As Eleanor Keene, slightly flushed and beautiful in her unwonted nervous excitement, took her seat, a flutter went around the corridor, and, with the single exception of Doña Isabel, an almost imperceptible drawing together of the other ladies, in offensive alliance. Miss Keene had never abandoned her own style of dress; and that afternoon her delicate and closely-fitting white muslin, gathered in at the waist with a broad blue belt of ribbon, seemed to accentuate somewhat unflatteringly the tropical négligé of Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb. Brace, who was in attendance, with Crosby, on the two Ramirez girls, could not help being uneasily conscious of this, in addition to the awkwardness of meeting Miss Keene after the transfer of his affections elsewhere. Nor was his embarrassment relieved by Crosby's confidences to him, in a half audible whisper, —

"I say, old man, after all, the regular straight-out American style lays over all their foreign flops and fandoodles. I wonder what old Brimmer would say to his wife's full-dress nightgown — eh?"

But at this moment the long-drawn, slightly stridulous utterances of Mrs. Brimmer rose through the other greetings like a lazy east wind.

"I shall never forgive the commander for making the Presidio so attractive to you, dear Miss Keene, that you cannot really find time to see your own countrymen. Though, of course, you're not to blame for not coming to see two frights as we must look — not having been educated to be able to do up our dresses in that faultless style — and perhaps not having the entire control over an

establishment like you; yet, I suppose that, even if the alcalde did give us *carte blanche* of the laundry *here*, we could n't do it, unaided even by Mrs. Markham. Yes, dear; you must let me compliment you on your skill, and the way you make things last. As for me and Miss Chubb, we 've only found our things fit to be given away to the poor of the Mission. But I suppose even that charity would look as shabby to you as our clothes, in comparison with the really good missionary work you and Mr. Hurlstone — or is it Mr. Brace? — I always confound your admirers, my dear — are doing now. At least, so says that good Father Esteban."

But with the exception of the alcalde and Miss Chubb, Mrs. Brimmer's words fell on unheeding ears, and Miss Keene did not prejudice the triumph of her own superior attractions by seeming to notice Mrs. Brimmer's innuendo. She answered briefly, and entered into lively conversation with Crosby and the secretary, holding the hand of Doña Isabel in her own, as if to assure her that she was guiltless of any design against her former admirer. This was quite unnecessary, as the gentle Isabel, after bidding Brace, with a rap on the knuckles, to "go and play," contented herself with curling up like a kitten beside Miss Keene, and left that gentleman to wander somewhat aimlessly in the patio.

Nevertheless, Miss Keene, whose eyes and ears were nervously alert, and who had indulged a faint hope of meeting Padre Esteban and hearing news of Hurlstone, glanced from time to time towards the entrance of the patio. A singular presentiment that some outcome of this present visit would determine her relations with Hurlstone had already possessed her. Consequently she was conscious, before it had attracted the attention of the others, of some vague stirring in the plaza beyond. Suddenly the clatter of hoofs was heard before the gateway. There was a moment's pause of dismounting, a gruff order

given in Spanish, and the next moment three strangers entered the patio.

They were dressed in red shirts, their white trousers tucked in high boots, and wore slouched hats. They were so travel-stained, dusty, and unshaven, that their features were barely distinguishable. One, who appeared to be the spokesman of the party, cast a perfunctory glance around the corridor, and, in fluent Spanish, began with the mechanical air of a man repeating some formula, —

"We are the bearers of a dispatch to the Comandante of Todos Santos from the Governor of Mazatlan. The officer and the escort who came with us are outside the gate. We have been told that the comandante is in this house. The case is urgent, or we would not intrude" —

He was stopped by the voice of Mrs. Markham from the corridor. "Well, I don't understand Spanish much — I may be a fool, or crazy, or perhaps both — but if that is n't James Markham's *voice*, I 'll bet a cooky!"

The three strangers turned quickly towards the corridor. The next moment the youngest of their party advanced eagerly towards Miss Keene, who had arisen with a half frightened joy, and with the cry of "Why, it 's Nell!" ran towards her. The third man came slowly forward as Mrs. Brimmer slipped hastily from the hammock and stood erect.

"In the name of goodness, Barbara," said Mr. Brimmer, closing upon her, in a slow, portentous whisper, "where *are* your stockings?"

CHAPTER VI

A MORE IMPORTANT ARRIVAL.

THE commander was the first to recover his presence of mind. Taking the despatch from the hands of the unlooked-for husband of the woman he loved, he opened it with an immovable face and habitual precision. Then turning with a military salute to the strangers, he bade them join him in half an hour at the Presidio; and bowing gravely to the assembled company, stepped from the corridor. But Mrs. Markham was before him, stopped him with a gesture, and turned to her husband.

"James Markham — where 's your hand?"

Markham, embarrassed but subjugated, disengaged it timidly from his wife's waist.

"Give it to that gentleman — for a gentleman he is, from the crown of his head to the soles of his boots! There! Shake his hand! You don't get such a chance every day. You can thank him again, later."

As the two men's hands parted, after this perfunctory grasp, and the commander passed on, she turned again to her husband.

"Now, James, I am ready to hear all about it. Perhaps you 'll tell me where you *have* been?"

There was a moment of embarrassing silence. The doctor and secretary had discreetly withdrawn; the alcalde, after a brief introduction to Mr. Brimmer, and an incomprehensible glance from the wife, had retired with a colorless face. Doña Isabel had lingered last to blow a kiss across her fan to Eleanor Keene that half mischievously included her brother. The Americans were alone.

Thus appealed to, Mr. Markham hastily began his story. But as he progressed, a slight incoherency was noticeable: he occasionally contradicted himself, and was obliged to be sustained, supplemented, and, at times, corrected, by Keene and Brimmer. Substantially, it appeared that they had come from San Francisco to Mazatlan, and, through the influence of Mr. Brimmer on the Mexican authorities, their party, with an escort of dragoons, had been transported across the gulf and landed on the opposite shore, where they had made a forced march across the desert to Todos Santos. Literally interpreted, however, by the nervous Markham, it would seem that they had conceived this expedition long ago, and yet had difficulties because they only thought of it the day before the steamer sailed; that they had embarked for the isthmus of Nicaragua, and yet had stopped at Mazatlan; that their information was complete in San Francisco, and only picked up at Mazatlan; that "friends" — sometimes contradictorily known as "he" and "she" — had overpowering influence with the Mexican Government, and alone had helped them, and yet that they were utterly dependent upon the efforts of Señor Perkins, who had compromised matters with the Mexican Government and everybody.

"Do you mean to say, James Markham, that you've seen Perkins, and it was he who told you we were here?"

"No — not *him* exactly."

"Let me explain," said Mr. Brimmer hastily. "It appears," he corrected his haste with practical business-like precision, "that the filibuster Perkins, after debarking you here, and taking the Excelsior to Quinquinambo, actually established the Quinquinambo Government, and got Mexico and the other confederacies to recognize its independence. Quinquinambo behaved very handsomely, and not only allowed the Mexican Government indemnity for breaking the neutrality of Todos Santos by the seizure, but even com-

promised with our own government their claim to confiscate the Excelsior for treaty violation, and paid half the value of the vessel, besides giving information to Mexico and Washington of your whereabouts. We consequently represent a joint commission from both countries to settle the matter and arrange for your return."

"But what I want to know is this: Is it to Señor Perkins that we ought to be thankful for seeing you here at all?" asked Mrs. Markham impatiently.

"No, no — not that, exactly," stammered Markham. "Oh, come now, Susannah" —

"No," said Richard Keene earnestly; "by Jove! some thanks ought to go to Belle Montgomery" — He checked himself in sudden consternation.

There was a chilly silence. Even Miss Keene looked anxiously at her brother, as the voice of Mrs. Brimmer for the first time broke the silence.

"May we be permitted to know who is this person to whom we owe so great an obligation?"

"Certainly," said Brimmer. "She was — as I have already intimated — a friend; possibly you know," he added, turning lightly to his companions, as if to corroborate an impression that had just struck him, "perhaps a — a — a sweetheart of the Señor Perkins."

"And how was she so interested in us, pray?" said Mrs. Markham.

"Well, you see, she had an idea that a former husband was on board of the Excelsior."

He stopped suddenly, remembering from the astonished faces of Keene and Markham that the secret was not known to them, while they, impressed with the belief that the story was a sudden invention of Brimmer's, with difficulty preserved their composure. But the women were quick to notice their confusion, and promptly disbelieved Brimmer's explanation.

"Well, as there 's no Mister Montgomery here, she 's probably mistaken," said Mrs. Markham, with decision, "though it strikes *me* that she 's very likely had the same delusion on board of some other ship. Come along, James; perhaps after you 've had a bath and some clean clothes, you may come out a little more like the man I once knew. I don't know how Mrs. Brimmer feels, but I feel more as if I required to be introduced to you — than your friend's friend, Mrs. Montgomery. At any rate, try and look and behave a little more decent when you go over to the Presidio."

With these words she dragged him away. Mr. Brimmer, after a futile attempt to appear at his ease, promptly effected the usual marital diversion of carrying the war into the enemy's camp.

"For Heaven's sake, Barbara," he said, with ostentatious indignation, "go and dress yourself properly. Had you neither money nor credit to purchase clothes? I declare I did n't know you at first; and when I did, I was shocked; before Mrs. Markham, too!"

"Mrs. Markham, I fear, has quite enough to occupy her now," said Mrs. Brimmer shortly, as she turned away, with hysterically moist eyes, leaving her husband to follow her.

Oblivious of this comedy, Richard Keene and Eleanor had already wandered back, hand in hand, to their days of childhood. But even in the joy that filled the young girl's heart in the presence of her only kinsman, there was a strange reservation. The meeting that she had looked forward to with eager longing had brought all she expected; more than that, it seemed to have been providentially anticipated at the moment of her greatest need, and yet it was incomplete. She was ashamed that after the first recognition, a wild desire to run to Hurlstone and tell *him* her happiness was her only thought. She was shocked that the bright joyous face of this handsome lovable boy

could not shut out the melancholy austere features of Hurlstone, which seemed to rise reproachfully between them. When, for the third and fourth time, they had recounted their past history, exchanged their confidences and feelings, Dick, passing his arm around his sister's waist, looked down smilingly in her eyes.

"And so, after all, little Nell, everybody has been good to you, and you have been happy!"

"Everybody has been kind to me, Dick, far kinder than I deserved. Even if I had really been the great lady that little Doña Isabel thought I was, or the important person the commander believed me to be, I could n't have been treated more kindly. I have met with nothing but respect and attention. I have been very happy, Dick, very happy."

And with a little cry she threw herself on her brother's neck and burst into a childlike flood of inconsistent tears.

Meantime the news of the arrival of the relief-party had penetrated even the peaceful cloisters of the Mission, and Father Esteban had been summoned in haste to the council. He returned with an eager face to Hurlstone, who had been anxiously awaiting him. When the padre had imparted the full particulars of the event to his companion, he added gravely, —

"You see, my son, how Providence, which has protected you since you first claimed the Church's sanctuary, has again interfered to spare me the sacrifice of using the power of the Church in purely mundane passions. I meekly accept the rebuke of His better-ordained ways, and you, Diego, may comfort yourself that this girl is restored directly to her brother's care, without any deviousness of plan or human responsibility. You do not speak, my son!" continued the priest anxiously; "can it be possible that, in the face of this gracious approval of Providence to your resolution, you are regretting it?"

The young man replied, with a half-reproachful gesture, —

"Do you, then, think me still so weak? No, Father Esteban; I have steeled myself against my selfishness for her sake. I could have resigned her to the escape you had planned, believing her happier for it, and ignorant of the real condition of the man she had learnt to — to — pity. But," he added, turning suddenly and almost rudely upon the priest, "do you know the meaning of this irruption of the outer world to *me?* Do you reflect that these men probably know my miserable story? — that, as one of the passengers of the Excelsior, they will be obliged to seek me and to restore me," he added, with a bitter laugh, "to *my* home, *my* kindred — to the world I loathe?"

"But you need not follow them. Remain here."

"Here! — with the door thrown open to any talebearer *or perhaps to my wife herself?* Never! Hear me, father," he went on hurriedly: "these men have come from San Francisco — have been to Mazatlan. Can you believe that it is possible that they have never heard of this woman's search for me? No! The quest of hate is as strong as the quest of love, and more merciless to the hunted."

"But if that were so, foolish boy, she would have accompanied them."

"You are wrong! It would have been enough for her to have sent my exposure by them — to have driven me from this refuge."

"This is but futile fancy, Diego," said Father Esteban, with a simulated assurance he was far from feeling. "Nothing has yet been said — nothing may be said. Wait, my child."

"Wait!" he echoed bitterly. "Ay, wait until the poor girl shall hear — perhaps from her brother's lips — the story of my marriage as bandied about by others; wait for her to know that the man who would have made her love him was

another's, and unworthy of her respect? No! it is *I* who must leave this place, and at once."

"*You?*" echoed the padre. "How?"

"By the same means you would have used for her departure. I must take her place in that ship you are expecting. You will give *me* letters to your friends. Perhaps, when this is over, I may return — if I still live."

Padre Esteban became thoughtful.

"You will not refuse me?" said the young man, taking the padre's hand. "It is for the best, believe me. I will remain secret here until then. You will invent some excuse — illness, or what you like — to keep them from penetrating here. Above all, to spare me from the misery of ever reading my secret in her face."

Father Esteban remained still absorbed in thought.

"You will take a letter from me to the archbishop, and put yourself under his care?" he asked at last, after a long pause. "You will promise me that?"

"I do!"

"Then we shall see what can be done. They talk, those Americanos," continued the priest, "of making their way up the coast to Punta St. Jago, where the ship they have already sent for to take them away can approach the shore; and the comandante has orders to furnish them escort and transport to that point. It is a foolish indiscretion of the government, and I warrant without the sanction of the Church. Already there is curiosity, discontent, and wild talk among the people. Ah! thou sayest truly, my son," said the old man gloomily; "the doors of Todos Santos are open. The comandante will speed these heretics quickly on their way; but the doors by which they came and whence they go will never close again. But God's will be done! And if the open doors bring thee back, my son, I shall not question His will!"

It would seem, however, as if Hurlstone's fears had been

groundless. For in the excitement of the succeeding days, and the mingling of the party from San Antonio with the newcomers, the recluse had been forgotten. So habitual had been his isolation from the others, that, except for the words of praise and gratitude hesitatingly dropped by Miss Keene to her brother, his name was not mentioned, and it might have been possible for the relieving party to have left him behind — unnoticed. Mr. Brimmer, for domestic reasons, was quite willing to allow the episode of Miss Montgomery's connection with their expedition to drop for the present. Her name was only recalled once by Miss Keene. When Dick had professed a sudden and violent admiration for the coquettish Doña Isabel, Eleanor had looked up in her brother's face with a half-troubled air.

"Who was this queer Montgomery woman, Dick?" she said.

Dick laughed — a frank, reassuring, heart-free laugh.

"Perfectly stunning, Nell. Such a figure in tights! You ought to have seen her dance — my!"

"Hush! I dare say she was horrid!"

"Not at all! She was n't such a bad fellow, if you left out her poetry and gush, which I did n't go in for much, — though the other fellows" — he stopped, from a sudden sense of loyalty to Brimmer and Markham. "No; you see, Nell, she was regularly ridiculously struck after that man Perkins, — whom she 'd never seen, — a kind of schoolgirl worship for a pirate. You know how you women go in for those fellows with a mystery about 'em."

"No, I don't!" said Miss Keene sharply, with a slight rise of color; "and I don't see what that 's got to do with you and her."

"Everything! She was in correspondence with Perkins, and knows about the Excelsior affair, and wants to help him get out of it with clean hands, don't you see! That 's why she made up to us. There, Nell; she ain't your style,

of course; but you owe a heap to her for giving us points as to where you were. But that 's all over now; she left us at Mazatlan, and went on to Nicaragua to meet Perkins somewhere there — for the fellow has always got some Central American revolution on hand, it appears. Until they garrote or shoot him some day, he 'll go on in the liberating business forever."

"Then there was n't any Mr. Montgomery, of course?" said Eleanor.

"Oh, Mr. Montgomery," said Dick, hesitating. "Well, you see, Nell, I think that, knowing how correct and all that sort of thing Brimmer is, she sort of invented the husband to make her interest look more proper."

"It 's shameful!" said Miss Keene indignantly.

"Come, Nell; one would think you had a personal dislike to her. Let her go; she won't trouble you — nor, I reckon, *anybody*, much longer."

"What do you mean, Dick?"

"I mean she has regularly exhausted and burnt herself out with her hysterics and excitements, and the drugs she 's taken to subdue them — to say nothing of the Panama fever she got last spring. If she don't go regularly crazy at last she 'll have another attack of fever, hanging round the isthmus waiting for Perkins."

Meanwhile, undisturbed by excitement or intrusion of the outer world, the days had passed quietly at the Mission. But one evening, at twilight, a swift-footed, lightly clad Indian glided into the sacristy as if he had slipped from the outlying fog, and almost immediately as quietly glided away again and disappeared. The next moment Father Esteban's gaunt and agitated face appeared at Hurlstone's door.

"My son, God has been merciful, and cut short your probation. The signal of the ship has just been made. Her boat will be waiting on the beach two leagues from

here an hour hence. Are you ready? and are you still resolved?"

"I am," said Hurlstone, rising. "I have been prepared since you first assented."

The old man's lips quivered slightly, and the great brown hand laid upon the table trembled for an instant; with a strong effort he recovered himself, and said hurriedly, —

"Concho's mule is saddled and ready for you at the foot of the garden. You will follow the beach a league beyond the Indians' cross. In the boat will await you the trusty messenger of the Church. You will say to him, 'Guadalajara,' and give him these letters. One is to the captain. You will require no other introduction." He laid the papers on the table, and turning to Hurlstone, lifted his tremulous hands in the air. "And now, my son, may the grace of God" —

He faltered and stopped, his uplifted arms falling helplessly on Hurlstone's shoulders. For an instant the young man supported him in his arms, then placed him gently in the chair he had just quitted, and for the first time in their intimacy dropped upon his knee before him. The old man, with a faint smile, placed his hand upon his companion's head. A breathless pause followed; Father Esteban's lips moved silently. Suddenly the young man rose, pressed his lips hurriedly to the father's hand, and passed out into the night.

The moon was already suffusing the dropping veil of fog above him with that nebulous, mysterious radiance he had noticed the first night he had approached the Mission. When he reached the cross he dismounted, and gathering a few of the sweet-scented blossoms that crept around its base, placed them in his breast. Then, remounting, he continued his way until he came to the spot designated by Concho as a fitting place to leave his tethered mule. This

done, he proceeded on foot about a mile further along the hard, wet sand, his eyes fixed on the narrow strip of water and shore before him that was yet uninvaded by the fog on either side.

The misty, nebulous light, the strange silence, broken only by the occasional low hurried whisper of some spent wave that sent its film of spume across his path, or filled his footprints behind him, possessed him with vague presentiments and imaginings. At times he fancied he heard voices at his side; at times indistinct figures loomed through the mist before him. At last what seemed to be his own shadow faintly impinged upon the mist at one side impressed him so strongly that he stopped; the apparition stopped too. Continuing a few hundred paces further, he stopped again; but this time the ghostly figure passed on, and convinced him that it was no shadow, but some one actually following him. With an angry challenge he advanced towards it. It quickly retreated inland, and was lost. Irritated and suspicious he turned back towards the water, and was amazed to see before him, not twenty yards away, the object of his quest — a boat with two men in it, kept in position by the occasional lazy dip of an oar. In the pursuit of his mysterious shadow he had evidently overlooked it. As his own figure emerged from the fog, the boat pulled towards him. The priest's password was upon his lips, when he perceived that the *two* men were common foreign sailors; the messenger of the Church was evidently not there. Could it have been he who had haunted him? He paused irresolutely. "Is there none other coming?" he asked. The two men looked at each other. One said, "Quien sabe!" and shrugged his shoulders. Hurlstone without further hesitation leaped aboard.

The same dull wall of vapor — at times thickening to an almost impenetrable barrier, and again half suffocating him in its soft embrace — which he had breasted on the night

he swam ashore, carried back his thoughts to that time, now so remote and unreal. And when, after a few moments' silent rowing, the boat approached a black hulk that seemed to have started forward out of the gloom to meet them, his vague recollection began to take a more definite form. As he climbed up the companion-ladder and boarded the vessel, an inexplicable memory came over him. A petty officer on the gangway advanced silently and ushered him, half dazed and bewildered, into the cabin. He glanced hurriedly around: the door of a state-room opened, and disclosed the indomitable and affable Señor Perkins! A slight expression of surprise, however, crossed the features of the Liberator of Quinquinambo as he advanced with outstretched hand.

"This is really a surprise, my dear fellow! I had no idea that *you* were in this affair. But I am delighted to welcome you once more to the Excelsior!"

CHAPTER VII

THE RETURN OF THE EXCELSIOR

AMAZED and disconcerted, Hurlstone, nevertheless, retained his presence of mind.

"There must be some mistake," he said coolly; "I am certainly not the person you seem to be expecting."

"Were you not sent here by Winslow?" demanded Perkins.

"No. The person you are looking for is probably one I saw on the shore. He no doubt became alarmed at my approach, and has allowed me quite unwittingly to take his place in the boat."

Perkins examined Hurlstone keenly for a moment, stepped to the door, gave a brief order, and returned.

"Then, if you did not intend the honor of this visit for me," he resumed, with a smile, "may I ask, my dear fellow, whom you expected to meet, and on what ship? There are not so many at Todos Santos, if my memory serves me right, as to create confusion."

"I must decline to answer that question," said Hurlstone curtly.

The señor smiled, with an accession of his old gentleness.

"My dear young friend," he said, "have you forgotten that on a far more important occasion to *you,* I showed no desire to pry into your secret?" Hurlstone made a movement of deprecation. "Nor have I any such desire now. But for the sake of our coming to an understanding as friends, let me answer the question for you. You are here,

my dear fellow, as a messenger from the Mission of Todos Santos to the Ecclesiastical Commission from Guadalajara, whose ship touches here every three years. It is now due. You have mistaken this vessel for theirs."

Hurlstone remained silent.

"It is no secret," continued Señor Perkins blandly; "nor shall I pretend to conceal *my* purpose here, which is on the invitation of certain distressed patriots of Todos Santos, to assist them in their deliverance from the effete tyranny of the Church and its government. I have been fortunate enough to anticipate the arrival of your vessel, as you were fortunate enough to anticipate the arrival of my messenger. I am doubly fortunate, as it gives me the pleasure of your company this evening, and necessitates no further trouble than the return of the boat for the other gentleman — which has already gone. Doubtless you may know him."

"I must warn you again, Señor Perkins," said Hurlstone sternly, "that I have no connection with any political party; nor have I any sympathy with your purpose against the constituted authorities."

"I am willing to believe that you have no political affinities at all, my dear Mr. Hurlstone," returned Perkins, with unruffled composure, "and, consequently, we will not argue as to what is the constituted authority of Todos Santos. Perhaps to-morrow it may be on board *this ship*, and I may still have the pleasure of making you at home here!"

"Until then," said Hurlstone dryly, "at least you will allow me to repair my error by returning to the shore."

"For the moment I hardly think it would be wise," replied Perkins gently. "Allowing that you escaped the vigilance of my friends on the shore, whose suspicions you have aroused, and who might do you some injury, you would feel it your duty to inform those who sent you of the presence of my ship, and thus precipitate a collision be-

tween my friends and yours, which would be promotive of ill-feeling, and perhaps bloodshed. You know my peaceful disposition, Mr. Hurlstone; you can hardly expect me to countenance an act of folly that would be in violation of it."

"In other words, having decoyed me here on board your ship, you intend to detain me," said Hurlstone insultingly.

"'Decoy,'" said Perkins in gentle deprecation, "'decoy' is hardly the word I expected from a gentleman who has been so unfortunate as to take, unsolicited and of his own free will, another person's place in a boat. But," he continued, assuming an easy argumentative attitude, "let us look at it from your view-point. Let us imagine that *your* ship had anticipated mine, and that *my* messenger had unwittingly gone on board of *her*. What do you think they would have done to him?"

"They would have hung him at the yard-arm, as he deserved," said Hurlstone unflinchingly.

"You are wrong," said Perkins gently. "They would have given him the alternative of betraying his trust, and confessing everything — which he would probably have accepted. Pardon me! — this is no insinuation against you," he interrupted, — "but I regret to say that my experience with the effete Latin races of this continent has not inspired me with confidence in their loyalty to trust. Let me give you an instance," he continued, smiling: "the ship you are expecting is supposed to be an inviolable secret of the Church, but it is known to me — to my friends ashore — and even to you, my poor friend, a heretic! More than that, I am told that the comandante, the padre, and alcalde are actually arranging to deport some of the American women by this vessel, which has been hitherto sacred to the emissaries of the Church alone. But you probably know this — it is doubtless part of your errand. I only

mention it to convince you that I have certainly no need either to know your secrets, to hang you from the yard-arm if you refused to give them up, or to hold you as hostage for my messenger, who, as I have shown you, can take care of himself. I shall not ask you for that secret despatch you undoubtedly carry next your heart, because I don't want it. You are at liberty to keep it until you can deliver it, or drop it out of that port-hole into the sea — as you choose. But I hear the boat returning," continued Perkins, rising gently from his seat as the sound of oars came faintly alongside, "and no doubt with Winslow's messenger. I am sorry you won't let me bring you together. I dare say he knows all about you, and it really need not alter your opinions."

"One moment," said Hurlstone, stunned, yet incredulous of Perkins's revelations. "You said that both the comandante and alcalde had arranged to send away certain ladies — are you not mistaken?"

"I think not," said Perkins quietly, looking over a pile of papers on the table before him. "Yes, here it is," he continued, reading from a memorandum: "'Don Ramon Ramirez arranged with Pepe for the secret carrying off of Doña Barbara Brimmer.' Why, that was six weeks ago, and here we have the comandante suborning one Marcia, a dragoon, to abduct Mrs. Markham — by Jove, my old friend! — and Doña Leonor — our beauty, was she not? Yes, here it is: in black and white. Read it, if you like, — and pardon me for one moment, while I receive this unlucky messenger."

Left to himself, Hurlstone barely glanced at the memorandum, which seemed to be the rough minutes of some society. He believed Perkins; but was it possible that the padre could be ignorant of the designs of his fellow-councilors? And if he were not — if he had long before been in complicity with them for the removal of Eleanor,

might he not also have duped him, Hurlstone, and sent him on this mission as a mere blind; and — more infamously — perhaps even thus decoyed him on board the wrong ship? No — it was impossible! His honest blood quickly flew to his cheek at that momentary disloyal suspicion.

Nevertheless, the señor's bland revelations filled him with vague uneasiness. *She* was safe with her brother now; but what if he and the other Americans were engaged in this ridiculous conspiracy, this pot-house rebellion that Father Esteban had spoken of, and which he had always treated with such contempt? It seemed strange that Perkins had said nothing of the arrival of the relieving party from the gulf, and its probable effect on the malcontents. Did he know it? or was the news now being brought by this messenger whom he, Hurlstone, had supplanted? If so, when and how had Perkins received the intelligence that brought him to Todos Santos? The young man could scarcely repress a bitter smile as he remembered the accepted idea of Todos Santos' inviolability — that inaccessible port that had within six weeks secretly summoned Perkins to its assistance! And it was there he believed himself secure! What security had he at all? Might not this strange, unimpassioned, omniscient man already know *his* secret as he had known the others'?

The interview of Perkins with the messenger in the next cabin was a long one, and apparently a stormy one on the part of the newcomer. Hurlstone could hear his excited foreign voice, shrill with the small vehemence of a shallow character; but there was no change in the slow, measured tones of the señor. He listlessly began to turn over the papers on the table. Presently he paused. He had taken up a sheet of paper on which Señor Perkins had evidently been essaying some composition in verse. It seemed to have been of a lugubrious character. The titular line

at the top of the page, "Dirge," had been crossed out for the substituted "In Memoriam." He read carelessly: —

"O Muse unmet — but not unwept —
I seek thy sacred haunt in vain.
Too late, alas! the tryst is kept —
We may not meet again!

"I sought thee 'midst the orange bloom,
To find that thou hadst grasped the palm
Of martyr, and the silent tomb
Had hid thee in its calm.

"By fever racked, thou languishest
On Nicaragua's" —

Hurlstone threw the paper aside. Although he had not forgotten the señor's reputation for sentimental extravagance, and on another occasion might have laughed at it, there was something so monstrous in this hysterical, morbid composition of the man who was even then contemplating bloodshed and crime, that he was disgusted. Like most sentimental egotists, Hurlstone was exceedingly intolerant of that quality in others, and he turned for relief to his own thoughts of Eleanor Keene and his own unfortunate passion. *He* could not have written poetry at such a moment!

But the cabin-door opened, and Señor Perkins appeared. Whatever might have been the excited condition of his unknown visitor, the señor's round, clean-shaven face was smiling and undisturbed by emotion. As his eye fell on the page of manuscript Hurlstone had just cast down, a slight shadow crossed his beneficent expanse of forehead, and deepened in his soft dark eyes; but the next moment it was chased away by his quick-recurring smile. Even thus transient and superficial was his feeling, thought Hurlstone.

"I have some news for you," said Perkins affably, "which may alter your decision about returning. My friends ashore," he continued, "judging from the ingen-

uous specimen which has just visited me, are more remarkable for their temporary zeal and spasmodic devotion than for prudent reserve or lasting discretion. They have submitted a list to me of those whom they consider dangerous to Mexican liberty, and whom they are desirous of hanging. I regret to say that the list is illogical and the request inopportune. Our friend Mr. Banks is put down as an ally of the government and an objectionable business rival of that eminent patriot and well-known drover, Señor Martinez, who just called upon me. Mr. Crosby's humor is considered subversive of a proper respect for all patriotism; but I cannot understand why they have added *your* name as especially 'dangerous.'"

Hurlstone made a gesture of contempt.

"I suppose they pay me the respect of considering me a friend of the old priest. So be it! I hope they will let the responsibility fall on me alone."

"The padre is already proscribed as one of the council," said Señor Perkins quietly.

"Do you mean to say," said Hurlstone impetuously, "that you will permit a hair of that innocent old man's head to be harmed by those wretches?"

"You are generous but hasty, my friend," said Señor Perkins, in gentle deprecation. "Allow me to put your question in another way. Ask me if I intend to perpetuate the Catholic Church in Todos Santos by adding another martyr to its roll, and I will tell you — No! I need not say that I am equally opposed to any proceeding against Banks, Crosby, and yourself, for diplomatic reasons, apart from the kindly memories of our old associations on this ship. I have therefore been obliged to return to the excellent Martinez his little list, with the remark that I should hold *him* personally responsible if any of you are molested. There is, however, no danger. Messrs. Banks and Crosby are with the other Americans, whom we have guaranteed

to protect, at the Mission, in the care of your friend the padre. You are surprised! Equally so was the padre. Had you delayed your departure an hour you would have met them, and I should have been debarred the pleasure of your company.

"By to-morrow," continued Perkins, placing the tips of his fingers together reflectively, "the Government of Todos Santos will have changed hands, and without bloodshed. You look incredulous! My dear young friend, it has been a part of my professional pride to show the world that these revolutions can be accomplished as peacefully as our own changes of administration. But for a few infelicitous accidents, this would have been the case of the late liberation of Quinquinambo. The only risk run is to myself — the leader, and that is as it should be. But all this personal explanation is, doubtless, uninteresting to you, my young friend. I meant only to say that, if you prefer not to remain here, you can accompany me when I leave the ship at nine o'clock with a small reconnoitring party, and I will give you safe escort back to your friends at the Mission."

This amicable proposition produced a sudden revulsion of feeling in Hurlstone. To return to those people from whom he was fleeing, in what was scarcely yet a serious emergency, was not to be thought of! Yet, where could he go? How could he be near enough to assist *her* without again openly casting his lot among them? And would they not consider his return an act of cowardice? He could not restrain a gesture of irritation as he rose impatiently to his feet.

"You are agitated, my dear fellow. It is not unworthy of your youth; but, believe me, it is unnecessary," said Perkins, in his most soothing manner. "Sit down. You have an hour yet to make your decision. If you prefer to remain, you will accompany the ship to Todos Santos and join me."

"I don't comprehend you," interrupted Hurlstone suspiciously.

"I forgot," said Perkins, with a bland smile, "that you are unaware of our plan of campaign. After communicating with the insurgents, I land here with a small force to assist them. I do this to anticipate any action and prevent the interference of the Mexican coaster, now due, which always touches here through ignorance of the channel leading to the Bay of Todos Santos and the Presidio. I then send the Excelsior, that does know the channel, to Todos Santos, to appear before the Presidio, take the enemy in flank, and coöperate with us. The arrival of the Excelsior there is the last move of this little game, if I may so call it: it is 'checkmate to the King,' the clerical Government of Todos Santos."

A little impressed, in spite of himself, with the calm forethought and masterful security of the señor, Hurlstone thanked him with a greater show of respect than he had hitherto evinced. The señor looked gratified, but unfortunately placed that respect the next moment in peril.

"You were possibly glancing over these verses," he said, with a hesitating and almost awkward diffidence, indicating the manuscript Hurlstone had just thrown aside. "It is merely the first rough draft of a little tribute I had begun to a charming friend. I sometimes," he interpolated, with an apologetic smile, "trifle with the Muse. Perhaps I ought not to use the word 'trifle' in connection with a composition of a threnodial and dirge-like character," he continued deprecatingly. "Certainly not in the presence of a gentleman as accomplished and educated as yourself, to whom recreation of this kind is undoubtedly familiar. My occupations have been, unfortunately, of a nature not favorable to the indulgence of verse. As a college man yourself, my dear sir, you will probably forgive the lucubrations of an old graduate of William and Mary's, who

has forgotten his 'ars poetica.' The verses you have possibly glanced at are crude, I am aware, and perhaps show the difficulty of expressing at once the dictates of the heart and the brain. They refer to a dear friend now at peace. You have perhaps, in happier and more careless hours, heard me speak of Mrs. Euphemia M'Corkle, of Illinois?"

Hurlstone remembered indistinctly to have heard, even in his reserved exclusiveness on the Excelsior, the current badinage of the passengers concerning Señor Perkins' extravagant adulation of this unknown poetess. As a part of the staple monotonous humor of the voyage, it had only disgusted him. With a feeling that he was unconsciously sharing the burlesque relief of the passengers, he said, with a polite attempt at interest, —

"Then the lady is — no more?"

"If that term can be applied to one whose work is immortal," corrected Señor Perkins gently. "All that was finite of this gifted woman was lately forwarded by Adams's Express Company from San Juan, to receive sepulture among her kindred at Keokuk, Iowa."

"Did she say she was from that place?" asked Hurlstone, with half-automatic interest.

"The consul says she gave that request to the priest."

"Then you were not with her when she died?" said Hurlstone absently.

"I was *never* with her, neither then nor before," returned Señor Perkins gravely. Seeing Hurlstone's momentary surprise, he went on, "The late Mrs. M'Corkle and I never met — we were personally unknown to each other. You may have observed the epithet 'unmet' in the first line of the first stanza; you will then understand that the privation of actual contact with this magnetic soul would naturally impart more difficulty into elegiac expression."

"Then you never really saw the lady you admire?" said Hurlstone vacantly.

"Never. The story is a romantic one," said Perkins, with a smile that was half complacent and yet half embarrassed. "May I tell it to you? Thanks. Some three years ago I contributed some verses to the columns of a Western paper edited by a friend of mine. The subject chosen was my favorite one, 'The Liberation of Mankind,' in which I may possibly have expressed myself with some poetic fervor on a theme so dear to my heart. I may remark without vanity, that it received high encomiums — perhaps at some more opportune moment you may be induced to cast your eyes over a copy I still retain — but no praise touched me as deeply as a tribute in verse in another journal from a gifted unknown, who signed herself 'Euphemia.' The subject of the poem, which was dedicated to myself, was on the liberation of women — from — er — I may say certain domestic shackles; treated perhaps vaguely, but with grace and vigor. I replied a week later in a larger poem, recording more fully my theories and aspirations regarding a struggling Central American confederacy, addressed to 'Euphemia.' She rejoined with equal elaboration and detail, referring to a more definite form of tyranny in the relations of marriage, and alluding with some feeling to uncongenial experiences of her own. An instinct of natural delicacy, veiled under the hyperbole of 'want of space,' prevented my editorial friend from encouraging the repetition of this charming interchange of thought and feeling. But I procured the fair stranger's address; we began a correspondence at once imaginative and sympathetic in expression, if not always poetical in form. I was called to South America by the Macedonian cry of 'Quinquinambo!' I still corresponded with her. When I returned to Quinquinambo I received letters from her, dated from San Francisco. I feel that my words could only fail,

my dear Hurlstone, to convey to you the strength and support I derived from those impassioned breathings of aid and sympathy at that time. Enough for me to confess that it was mainly due to the deep womanly interest that *she* took in the fortunes of the passengers of the Excelsior that I gave the Mexican authorities early notice of their whereabouts. But, pardon me," — he stopped hesitatingly, with a slight flush, as he noticed the utterly inattentive face and attitude of Hurlstone, — "I am boring you. I am forgetting that this is only important to myself," he added, with a sigh. "I only intended to ask your advice in regard to the disposition of certain manuscripts and effects of hers, which are unconnected with our acquaintance. I thought, perhaps, I might intrust them to your delicacy and consideration. They are here, if you choose to look them over; and here is also what I believe to be a daguerreotype of the lady herself, but in which I fail to recognize her soul and genius."

He laid a bundle of letters and a morocco case on the table with a carelessness that was intended to hide a slight shade of disappointment in his face — and rose.

"I beg your pardon," said Hurlstone, in confused and remorseful apology; "but I frankly confess that my thoughts *were* preoccupied. Pray forgive me. If you will leave these papers with me, I promise to devote myself to them another time."

"As you please," said the señor, with a slight return of his old affability. "But don't bore yourself now. Let us go on deck."

He passed out of the cabin as Hurlstone glanced, half mechanically, at the package before him. Suddenly his cheek reddened; he stopped, looked hurriedly at the retreating form of Perkins, and picked up a manuscript from the packet. It was in his wife's handwriting. A

sudden idea flashed across his mind, and seemed to illuminate the obscure monotony of the story he had just heard. He turned hurriedly to the morocco case, and opened it with trembling fingers. It was a daguerreotype, faded and silvered; but the features were those of his wife!

CHAPTER VIII

HOSTAGE

The revolution of Todos Santos had to all appearances been effected as peacefully as the gentle Liberator of Quinquinambo could have wished. Two pronunciamentos, rudely printed and posted in the Plaza, and saluted by the fickle garrison of one hundred men, who had, however, immediately reappointed their old commander as generalissimo under the new régime, seemed to leave nothing to be desired. A surging mob of vacant and wondering peons, bearing a singular resemblance to the wild cattle and horses which intermingled with them in blind and unceasing movement across the Plaza and up the hilly street, and seemingly as incapable of self-government, were alternately dispersed and stampeded or allowed to gather again as occasion required. Some of these heterogeneous bands were afterwards found — the revolution accomplished — gazing stupidly on the sea, or ruminating in bovine wantonness on the glacis before the Presidio.

Eleanor Keene, who with her countrywomen had been hurried to the refuge of the Mission, was more disturbed and excited at the prospect of meeting Hurlstone again than by any terror of the insurrection. But Hurlstone was not there, and Father Esteban received her with a coldness she could not attribute entirely to her countrymen's supposed sympathy with the insurgents. When Richard Keene, who would not leave his sister until he had seen her safe under the Mission walls, ventured at her suggestion to ask after the American recluse, Father Esteban replied

dryly that, being a Christian gentleman, Hurlstone was the only one who had the boldness to seek out the American filibuster Perkins, on his own ship, and remonstrate with him for his unholy crusade. For the old priest had already become aware of Hurlstone's blunder, and he hated Eleanor as the primary cause of the trouble. But for her, Diego would be still with him in this emergency.

"Never mind, Nell," said Dick, noticing the disappointed eyes of his sister as they parted, "you 'll all be safe here until we return. Between you and me, Banks, Brimmer, and I think that Brace and Winslow have gone too far in this matter, and we 're going to stop it, unless the whole thing is over now, as they say."

"Don't believe that," said Crosby. "It 's like their infernal earthquakes; there 's always a second shock and a tidal wave to follow. I pity Brace, Winslow, and Perkins if they get caught in it."

There seemed to be some reason for his skepticism, for later the calm of the Mission Garden was broken upon by the monotonous tread of banded men on the shell-strewn walks, and the door of the refectory opened to the figure of Señor Perkins. A green silk sash across his breast, a gold-laced belt, supporting a light dress-sword and a pair of pistols, buckled around the jaunty waist of his ordinary black frock coat, were his scant martial suggestions. But his hat, albeit exchanged for a soft felt one, still reposed on the back of his benevolent head, and seemed to accent more than ever the contrast between his peaceful shoulders and the military smartness of his lower figure. He bowed with easy politeness to the assembled fugitives; but before he could address them, Father Esteban had risen to his feet, —

"I thought that this house, at least, was free from the desecrating footsteps of lawlessness and impiety," said the priest sternly. "How dare *you* enter here?"

"Nothing but the desire to lend my assistance to the claims of beauty, innocence, helplessness, and — if you will allow me to add," with a low bow to the priest — "sanctity, caused this intrusion. For I regret to say that, through the ill-advised counsels of some of my fellow-patriots, the Indian tribes attached to this Mission are in revolt, and threaten even this sacred building."

"It is false!" said Father Esteban indignantly. "Even under the accursed manipulation of your emissaries, the miserable heathen would not dare to raise a parricidal hand against the Church that fostered him!"

Señor Perkins smiled gently, but sadly.

"Your belief, reverend sir, does you infinite credit. But, to save time, let me give way to a gentleman who, I believe, possesses your confidence. He will confirm my statement."

He drew aside, and allowed Hurlstone, who had been standing unperceived behind, to step forward. The padre uttered an exclamation of pleasure. Miss Keene colored quickly. Hurlstone cast a long and lingering glance at her, which seemed to the embarrassed girl full of a new, strange meaning, and then advanced quickly with outstretched hands towards Father Esteban.

"He speaks truly," he said hurriedly, "and in the interests of humanity alone. The Indians have been tampered with treacherously, against his knowledge and consent. He only seeks now to prevent the consequences of this folly by placing you and these ladies out of reach of harm aboard of the Excelsior."

"A very proper and excellent idea," broke in Mrs. Brimmer, with genteel precision. "You see these people evidently recognize the fact of Mr. Brimmer's previous ownership of the Excelsior, and the respect that is due to him. I, for one, shall accept the offer, and insist upon Miss Chubb accompanying me."

"I shall be charmed to extend the hospitality of the Excelsior to you on any pretext," said the señor gallantly, "and, indeed, should insist upon personally accompanying you and my dear friends Mrs. Markham and Miss Keene; but, alas, I am required elsewhere. I leave," he continued turning towards Hurlstone, who was already absorbed in a whispered consultation with Padre Esteban — "I leave a sufficient escort with you to protect your party to the boats which have brought us here. You will take them to the Excelsior, and join me with the ship off Todos Santos in the morning. Adieu, my friends! Good-night, and farewell!"

The priest made a vehement movement of protestation, but he was checked by Hurlstone, as, with a low bow, Señor Perkins passed out into the darkness. The next moment his voice was heard raised in command, and the measured tramp of his men gradually receded and was lost in the distance.

"Does he think," said the priest indignantly, "that I, Padre Esteban, would desert my sacred trust, and leave His Holy Temple a prey to sacrilegious trespass? Never, while I live, Diego! Call him back and tell him so!"

"Rather listen to me, Father Esteban," said the young man earnestly. "I have a plan by which this may be avoided. From my knowledge of these Indians, I am convinced that they have been basely tricked and cajoled by some one. I believe that they are still amenable to reason and argument, and I am so certain that I am ready to go down among them and make the attempt. The old chief and part of his band are still encamped on the shore; we could hear them as we passed in the boats. I will go and meet them. If I succeed in bringing them to reason I will return; if I find them intractable, I will at least divert their attention from the Mission long enough for you to embark these ladies with their escort, which you will do at the end of two hours if I do not return."

"In two hours?" broke in Mrs. Brimmer, in sharp protest. "I positively object. I certainly understood that Señor Perkins' invitation, which, under the circumstances, I shall consider equal to a command from Mr. Brimmer, was to be accepted at once and without delay; and I certainly shall not leave Miss Chubb exposed to imminent danger for two hours to meet the caprice of an entire stranger to Mr. Brimmer."

"I am willing to stay with Father Esteban, if he will let me," said Eleanor Keene quietly, "for I have faith in Mr. Hurlstone's influence and courage, and believe he will be successful."

The young man thanked her with another demonstrative look that brought the warm blood to her cheek.

"Well," said Mrs. Markham promptly; "I suppose if Nell stays I must see the thing through and stay with her — even if *I* have n't orders from Jimmy."

"There is no necessity that either Mr. or Mrs. Brimmer should be disobeyed in their wishes," said Hurlstone grimly. "Luckily there are two boats; Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb can take one of them with half the escort, and proceed at once to the Excelsior. I will ride with them as far as the boat. And now," he continued, turning to the old priest, with sparkling eyes, "I have only to ask your blessing, and the good wishes of these ladies, to go forth on my mission of peace. If I am successful," he added, with a light laugh, "confess that a layman and a heretic may do some service for the Church." As the old man laid his half-detaining, half-benedictory hands upon his shoulders, the young man seized the opportunity to whisper in his ear, "Remember your promise to tell her *all* I have told you," and, with another glance at Miss Keene, he marshaled Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb before him, and hurried them to the boat.

Miss Keene looked after him with a vague felicity in

the change that seemed to have come on him, a change that she could as little account for as her own happiness. Was it the excitement of danger that had overcome his reserve, and set free his compressed will and energy? She longed for her brother to see him thus — alert, strong, and chivalrous. In her girlish faith, she had no fear for his safety; he would conquer, he would succeed; he would come back to them victorious! Looking up from her happy abstraction, at the side of Mrs. Markham, who had calmly gone to sleep in an armchair, she saw Father Esteban's eyes fixed upon her. With a warning gesture of the hand towards Mrs. Markham, he rose, and going to the door of the sacristy, beckoned to her. The young girl noiselessly crossed the room and followed him into the sanctuary.

Half an hour later, and while Mrs. Markham was still asleep, Father Esteban appeared at the door of the sacristy ostentatiously taking snuff and using a large red handkerchief to wipe his more than usually humid eyes. Eleanor Keene, with her chin resting on her hand, remained sitting as he had left her, with her abstracted eyes fixed vacantly on the lamp before the statue of the Virgin and the half-lit gloom of the nave.

Padre Esteban had told her *all!* She now knew Hurlstone's history even as he had hesitatingly imparted it to the old priest in this very church — perhaps upon the very seat where she sat. She knew the peace that he had sought for and found within these walls, broken only by his passion for her! She knew his struggles against the hopelessness of this new-born love, even the desperate remedy that had been adopted against herself, and the later voluntary exile of her lover. She knew the providential culmination of his trouble in the news brought unconsciously by Perkins, which, but a few hours ago, he had verified by the letters, records, and even the certificate of death that had thus strangely been placed in his hands!

She knew all this so clearly now, that, with the instinct of a sympathetic nature, she even fancied she had heard it before. She knew that all the obstacles to an exchange of their affection had been removed; that her lover only waited his opportunity to hear from her own lips the answer that was even now struggling at her heart. And yet she hesitated and drew back, half frightened in the presence of her great happiness. How she longed, and yet dreaded, to meet him! What if anything should have happened to him? — what if he should be the victim of some treachery? — what if he did not come? — what if? — "Good heavens! what was that?"

She was near the door of the sacristy, gazing into the dim and shadowy church. Either she was going mad, or else the grotesque Indian hangings of the walls were certainly moving towards her. She rose in speechless terror, as what she had taken for an uncouthly swathed and draped barbaric pillar suddenly glided to the window. Crouching against the wall, she crept breathlessly towards the entrance to the garden. Casting a hurried glance above her, she saw the open belfry that was illuminated by the misty radiance of the moon, darkly shadowed by hideously gibbering faces that peered at her through the broken tracery. With a cry of horror she threw open the garden-door; but the next moment was swallowed up in the tumultuous tide of wild and half-naked Indians who surged against the walls of the church, and felt herself lifted from her feet, with inarticulate cries, and borne along the garden. Even in her mortal terror, she could recognize that the cries were not those of rage, but of vacant satisfaction; that although she was lifted on lithe shoulders, the grasp of her limbs was gentle, and the few dark faces she could see around her were glistening in childlike curiosity. Presently she felt herself placed upon the back of a mule, that seemed to be swayed hither and thither in the shifting

mass, and the next moment the misty, tossing cortége moved forward with a new and more definite purpose. She called aloud for Father Esteban and Mrs. Markham; her voice appeared to flow back upon her from the luminous wall of fog that closed around her. Then the inarticulate, irregular outcries took upon themselves a measured rhythm, the movement of the mass formed itself upon the monotonous chant, the intervals grew shorter, the mule broke into a trot, and then the whole vast multitude fell into a weird, rhythmical, jogging quick step at her side.

Whatever was the intent of this invasion of the Mission and her own strange abduction, she was relieved by noticing that they were going in the same direction as that taken by Hurlstone an hour before. Either he was cognizant of their movements, and, being powerless to prevent their attack on the church, had stipulated they were to bring her to him in safety, or else he was calculating to intercept them on the way. The fog prevented her from forming any estimation of the numbers that surrounded her, or if the padre and Mrs. Markham were possibly preceding her as captives in the vanguard. She felt the breath of the sea, and knew they were traveling along the shore; the monotonous chant and jogging motion gradually dulled her active terror to an apathetic resignation, in which occasionally her senses seemed to swoon and swim in the dreamy radiance through which they passed; at times it seemed a dream or nightmare with which she was hopelessly struggling; at times she was taking part in an unhallowed pageant, or some heathen sacrificial procession of which she was the destined victim.

She had no consciousness of how long the hideous journey lasted. Her benumbed senses were suddenly awakened by a shock; the chant had ceased, the moving mass in which she was imbedded rolled forward once more as if by its own elasticity, and then receded again with a jar

that almost unseated her. Then the inarticulate murmur was overborne by a voice. It was *his!* She turned blindly towards it; but before she could utter the cry that rose to her lips, she was again lifted from the saddle, carried forward, and gently placed upon what seemed to be a moss-grown bank. Opening her half-swimming eyes she recognized the Indian cross. The crowd seemed to recede before her. Her eyes closed again as a strong arm passed around her waist.

"Speak to me, Miss Keene — Eleanor — my darling!" said Hurlstone's voice. "O my God! they have killed her!"

With an effort she moved her head and tried to smile. Their eyes, and then their lips met; she fainted.

When she struggled to her senses again, she was lying in the stern-sheets of the Excelsior's boat, supported on Mrs. Markham's shoulder. For an instant the floating veil of fog around her, and the rhythmical movement of the boat, seemed a part of her mysterious ride, and she raised her head with a faint cry for Hurlstone.

"It 's all right, my dear," said Mrs. Markham soothingly; "he 's ashore with the padre, and everything else is all right too. But it 's rather ridiculous to think that those idiotic Indians believed the only way they could show Mr. Hurlstone that they meant us no harm was to drag us all up to *their* Mission, as they call that half-heathen cross of theirs — for safety against — who do you think, dear? — the dreadful *Americans!* And imagine all the while the padre and I were just behind you, bringing up the rear of the procession — only they would n't let us join you because they wanted to show you special honor as " — she sank her voice to a whisper in Eleanor's ear — "as the future Mrs. Hurlstone! It appears they must have noticed something about you two, the last time you were there, my dear. And — to think — *you* never told me anything about it!"

When they reached the Excelsior, they found that Mrs. Brimmer, having already settled herself in the best cabin, was inclined to extend the hospitalities of the ship with the air of a hostess. But the arrival of Hurlstone at midnight with some delegated authority from Señor Perkins, and the unexpected getting under way of the ship, disturbed her complacency.

"We are going through the channel into the Bay of Todos Santos," was the brief reply vouchsafed her by Hurlstone.

"But why can't we remain here and wait for Mr. Brimmer?" she asked indignantly.

"Because," responded Hurlstone grimly, "the Excelsior is expected off the Presidio to-morrow morning to aid the insurgents."

"You don't mean to say that Miss Chubb and myself are to be put in the attitude of arraying ourselves against the constituted authorities — and, perhaps, Mr. Brimmer himself?" asked Mrs. Brimmer, in genuine alarm.

"It looks so," said Hurlstone a little maliciously; "but, no doubt, your husband and the señor will arrange it amicably."

To Mrs. Markham and Miss Keene he explained more satisfactorily that the unexpected disaffection of the Indians had obliged Perkins to so far change his plans as to disembark his entire force from the Excelsior, and leave her with only the complement of men necessary to navigate her through the channel of Todos Santos, where she would peacefully await his orders, or receive his men in case of defeat.

Nevertheless, as the night was nearly spent, Mrs. Markham and Eleanor preferred to await the coming day on deck, and watch the progress of the Excelsior through the mysterious channel. In a few moments the barque began to feel the combined influence of the tide and the slight morn-

ing breeze, and after rounding an invisible point, she presently rose and fell on the larger ocean swell. The pilot, whom Hurlstone recognized as the former third mate of the Excelsior, appeared to understand the passage perfectly; and even Hurlstone and the ladies, who had through eight months' experience become accustomed to the luminous obscurity of Todos Santos, could detect the faint looming of the headland at the entrance. The same soothing silence, even the same lulling of the unseen surf, which broke in gentle undulations over the bar, and seemed to lift the barque in rocking buoyancy over the slight obstruction, came back to them as on the day of their fateful advent. The low orders of the pilot, the cry of the leadsman in the chains, were but a part of the restful past.

Under the combined influence of the hour and the climate, the conversation fell into monosyllables, and Mrs. Markham dozed. The lovers sat silently together, but the memory of a kiss was between them. It spanned the gulf of the past with an airy bridge, over which their secret thoughts and fancies passed and repassed with a delicious security; henceforth they could not flee from that memory, even if they wished; they read it in each other's lightest glance; they felt it in the passing touch of each other's hands; it lingered, with vague tenderness, on the most trivial interchange of thought. Yet they spoke a little of the future. Eleanor believed that her brother would not object to their union; he had spoken of entering into business at Todos Santos, and perhaps when peace and security were restored they might live together. Hurlstone did not tell her that a brief examination of his wife's papers had shown him that the property he had set aside for her maintenance, and from which she had regularly drawn an income, had increased in value, and left him a rich man. He only pressed her hand, and whispered that her wishes should be his. They had become tenderly silent again, as

the Excelsior, now fairly in the bay, appeared to be slowly drifting, with listless sails and idle helm, in languid search of an anchorage. Suddenly they were startled by a cry from the lookout.

"Sail ho!"

There was an incredulous start on the deck. The mate sprang into the fore-rigging with an oath of protestation. But at the same moment the tall masts and spars of a vessel suddenly rose like a phantom out of the fog at their side. The half-disciplined foreign crew uttered a cry of rage and trepidation, and huddled like sheep in the waist, with distracted gestures; even the two men at the wheel forsook their post to run in dazed terror to the taffrail. Before the mate could restore order to this chaos, the Excelsior had drifted, with a scarcely perceptible concussion, against the counter of the strange vessel. In an instant a dozen figures appeared on its bulwarks, and dropped unimpeded upon the Excelsior's deck. As the foremost one approached the mate, the latter shrank back in consternation.

"Captain Bunker!"

"Yes," said the figure, advancing with a mocking laugh; "Captain Bunker it is. Captain Bunker, formerly of this American barque Excelsior, and now of the Mexican ship La Trinidad. Captain Bunker ez larnt every foot of that passage in an open boat last August, and did n't forget it yesterday in a big ship! Captain Bunker ez has just landed a company of dragoons to relieve the Presidio. What d' ye say to that, Mr. M'Carthy — eh?"

"I say," answered M'Carthy, raising his voice with a desperate effort to recover his calmness, — "I say that Perkins landed with double that number of men yesterday around that point, and that he 'll be aboard here in half an hour to make you answer for this insult to his ship and his government."

"His government!" echoed Bunker, with a hoarser

laugh; "hear him! — *his* government! His government died at four o'clock this morning, when his own ringleaders gave him up to the authorities. Ha! Why, this yer revolution is played out, old man; and Generalissimo Leonidas Perkins is locked up in the Presidio."

CHAPTER IX

LIBERATED

The revolution was, indeed, ended. The unexpected arrival of a relieving garrison in the Bay of Todos Santos had completed what the dissensions in the insurgents' councils had begun; the discontents, led by Brace and Winslow, had united with the government against Perkins and his aliens; but a compromise had been effected by the treacherous giving up of the Liberator himself in return for an amnesty granted to his followers. The part that Bunker had played in bringing about this moral catastrophe was, however, purely adventitious. When he had recovered his health, and subsequent events had corroborated the truth of his story, the Mexican Government, who had compromised with Quinquinambo, was obliged to recognize his claims by offering him command of the missionary ship, and permission to rediscover the channel, the secret of which had been lost for half a century to the government. He had arrived at the crucial moment when Perkins' command were scattered along the seashore, and the dragoons had invested Todos Santos without opposition.

Such was the story substantially told to Hurlstone and confirmed on his debarkation with the ladies at Todos Santos, the Excelsior being now in the hands of the authorities. Hurlstone did not hesitate to express to Padre Esteban his disgust at the treachery which had made a scapegoat of Señor Perkins. But to his surprise the cautious priest only shrugged his shoulders as he took a complacent pinch of snuff.

"Have a care, Diego! You are of necessity grateful to this man for the news he has brought — nay, more, for possibly being the instrument elected by Providence to precipitate the dénouement of that miserable woman's life — but let it not close your eyes to his infamous political career. I admit that he was opposed to the revolt of the heathen against us, but it was his emissaries and his doctrines that poisoned with heresy the fountains from which they drank. Enough! Be grateful! but do not expect *me* to intercede for Baal and Ashtaroth!"

"Intercede!" echoed Hurlstone, alarmed at the sudden sacerdotal hardness that had overspread the old priest's face. "Surely the council will not be severe with the man who was betrayed into their power by others equally guilty?"

Padre Esteban avoided Hurlstone's eyes as he answered with affected coolness, — "Quien sabe? There will be *expulsados*, no doubt. The Excelsior, which is confiscated, will be sent to Mexico with them."

"I must see Señor Perkins," said Hurlstone suddenly.

The priest hesitated.

"When?" he asked cautiously.

"At once."

"Good." He wrote a hurried line on a piece of paper, folded it, sealed it, and gave it to Hurlstone. "You will hand that to the comandante. He will give you access to the prisoner."

In less than half an hour Hurlstone presented himself before the commander. The events of the last twenty-four hours had evidently affected Don Miguel; for although he received Hurlstone courteously, there was a singular reflection of the priest's harshness in his face as he glanced over the missive. He took out his watch.

"I give you ten minutes with the prisoner, Don Diego. More, I cannot."

A little awed by the manner of the commander, Hurlstone bowed and followed him across the courtyard. It was filled with soldiers, and near the gateway a double file of dragoons, with loaded carbines, were standing at ease. Two sentries were ranged on each side of an open door which gave upon the courtyard. The commander paused before it, and with a gesture invited him to enter. It was a large square apartment, lighted only by the open door and a grated inclosure above it. Seated in his shirt-sleeves, before a rude table, Señor Perkins was quietly writing. The shadow of Hurlstone's figure falling across his paper caused him to look up.

Whatever anxiety Hurlstone had begun to feel, it was quickly dissipated by the hearty, affable, and even happy greeting of the prisoner.

"Ah! what! my young friend Hurlstone! Again an unexpected pleasure," he said, extending his white hands. "And again you find me wooing the Muse, in, I fear, hesitating numbers." He pointed to the sheet of paper before him, which showed some attempts at versification. "But I confess to a singular fascination in the exercise of poetic composition, in instants of leisure like this — a fascination which, as a man of imagination yourself, you can appreciate."

"And I am sorry to find you here, Señor Perkins," began Hurlstone frankly; "but I believe it will not be for long."

"My opinion," said the señor, with a glance of gentle contemplation at the distant comandante, "as far as I may express it, coincides with your own."

"I have come," continued Hurlstone earnestly, "to offer you my services. I am ready," he raised his voice, with a view of being overheard, "to bear testimony that you had no complicity in the baser part of the late conspiracy, — the revolt of the savages, and that you did your best to counteract the evil, although in doing so you have sacrificed

yourself. I shall claim the right to speak from my own knowledge of the Indians and from their admission to me that they were led away by the vague representations of Martinez, Brace, and Winslow."

"Pardon — pardon me," said Señor Perkins deprecatingly, "you are mistaken. My general instructions, no doubt, justified these young gentlemen in taking, I shall not say extreme, but injudicious measures." He glanced meaningly in the direction of the commander, as if to warn Hurlstone from continuing, and said gently, "But let us talk of something else. I thank you for your gracious intentions, but you remember that we agreed only yesterday that you knew nothing of politics, and did not concern yourself with them. I do not know but you are wise. Politics and the science of self-government, although dealing with general principles, are apt to be defined by the individual limitations of the enthusiast. What is good for *himself* he too often deems is applicable to the general public, instead of wisely understanding that what is good for *them* must be good for himself. But," said the señor lightly, "we are again transgressing. We were to choose another topic. Let it be yourself, Mr. Hurlstone. You are looking well, sir; indeed, I may say I never saw you looking so well! Let me congratulate you. Health is the right of youth. May you keep both!"

He shook Hurlstone's hand again with singular fervor.

There was a slight bustle and commotion at the door of the guard-room, and the commander's attention was called in that direction. Hurlstone profited by the opportunity to say in a hurried whisper: —

"Tell me what I can do for you;" and he hesitated to voice his renewed uneasiness — "tell me — if — if — if — your case is — urgent!"

Señor Perkins lifted his shoulders and smiled with grateful benevolence.

"You have already promised me to deliver those papers and manuscripts of my deceased friend, and to endeavor to find her relations. I do not think it is urgent, however."

"I do not mean that," said Hurlstone eagerly. "I"— but Perkins stopped him with a sign that the commander was returning.

Don Miguel approached them with disturbed and anxious looks.

"I have yielded to the persuasions of two ladies, Doña Leonor and the Señora Markham, to ask you to see them for a moment," he said to Señor Perkins. "Shall it be so? I have told them the hour is nearly spent."

"You have told them — *nothing more?*" asked the señor, in a whisper unheard by Hurlstone.

"No."

"Let them come, then."

The commander made a gesture to the sentries at the guard-room, who drew back to allow Mrs. Markham and Eleanor to pass. A little child, one of Eleanor's old Presidio pupils who, recognizing her, had followed her into the guard-room, now emerged with her, and momentarily disconcerted at the presence of the commander, ran, with the unerring instinct of childhood, to the señor for protection. The filibuster smiled; and lifting the child with a paternal gesture to his shoulder by one hand, he extended the other to the ladies.

"The commander," said Mrs. Markham briskly, "says it 's against the rules; that visiting time is up; and you 've already got a friend with you, and all that sort of thing; but I told him that I was bound to see you, if only to say that if there 's any meanness going on, Susannah and James Markham ain't in it! No! But we 're going to see you put right and square in the matter; and if we can't do it here, we 'll do it, if we have to follow you to Mexico! — that 's all!"

"And I," said Eleanor, grasping the señor's hand, and half blushing as she glanced at Hurlstone, "see that I have already a friend here who will help me to put in action all the sympathy I feel."

Señor Perkins drew himself up, and cast a faint look of pride towards the commander.

"To *hear* such assurances from beautiful and eloquent lips like those before me," he said, with his old oratorical wave of the hand, but a passing shadow across his mild eyes, "is more than sufficient. In my experience of life I have been favored, at various emergencies, by the sympathy and outspoken counsel of your noble sex; the last time by Mrs. Euphemia M'Corkle, of Peoria, Illinois, a lady of whom you have heard me speak — alas! now lately deceased. A few lines at present lying on yonder table — a tribute to her genius — will be forwarded to you, dear Mrs. Markham. But let us change the theme. You are looking well — and you, too, Miss Keene. From the roses that bloom on your cheeks — nourished by the humid air of Todos Santos — I am gratified in thinking you have forgiven me your enforced detention here."

At a gesture from the commander he ceased, stepped back, bowed gravely, and the ladies recognized that their brief audience had terminated. As they passed through the gateway, looking back they saw Perkins still standing with the child on his shoulder and smiling affably upon them. Then the two massive doors of the gateway swung to with a crash, the bolts were shot, and the courtyard was impenetrable.

. . . . . .

A few moments later, the three friends had passed the outermost angle of the fortifications, and were descending towards the beach. By the time they had reached the sands they had fallen into a vague silence.

A noise like the cracking and fall of some slight scaffold-

ing behind them arrested their attention. Hurlstone turned quickly. A light smoke, drifting from the courtyard, was mingling with the fog. A faint cry of "Dios y Libertad!" rose with it.

With a hurried excuse to his companions, Hurlstone ran rapidly back, and reached the gate as it slowly rolled upon its hinges to a file of men that issued from the courtyard. The first object that met his eyes was the hat of Señor Perkins lying on the ground near the wall, with a terrible suggestion in its helpless and pathetic vacuity. A few paces further lay its late owner, with twenty Mexican bullets in his breast, his benevolent forehead bared meekly to the sky, as if even then mutely appealing to the higher judgment. He was dead! The soul of the Liberator of Quinquinambo, and of various other peoples more or less distressed and more or less ungrateful, was itself liberated!

. . . . . .

With the death of Señor Perkins ended the Crusade of the Excelsior. Under charge of Captain Bunker the vessel was sent to Mazatlan by the authorities, bearing the banished and proscribed Americans, Banks, Brace, Winslow, and Crosby; and, by permission of the council, also their friends, Markham and Brimmer, and the ladies, Mrs. Brimmer, Chubb, and Markham. Hurlstone and Miss Keene alone were invited to remain; but, on later representations, the council graciously included Richard Keene in the invitation, with the concession of the right to work the mines and control the ranches he and Hurlstone had purchased from their proscribed countrymen. The complacency of the Council of Todos Santos may be accounted for when it is understood that on the day the firm of Hurlstone & Keene was really begun under the title of Mr. and Mrs. Hurlstone, Richard had prevailed upon the alcalde to allow him to add the piquant Doña Isabel also to the firm under the title of Mrs. Keene. Although the port of

Todos Santos was henceforth open to all commerce, the firm of Hurlstone & Keene long retained the monopoly of trade, and was a recognized power of intelligent civilization and honest progress on the Pacific coast. And none contributed more to that result than the clever and beautiful hostess of Excelsior Lodge, the charming country home of James Hurlstone, Esq., senior partner of the firm. Under the truly catholic shelter of its veranda Padre Esteban and the heretic stranger mingled harmoniously, and the dissensions of local and central government were forgotten.

"I said that you were a *dama de grandeza*, you remember," said the youthful Mrs. Keene to Mrs. Hurlstone, "and, you see, you are!"

A PHYLLIS OF THE SIERRAS

CHAPTER I

WHERE the great highway of the Sierras nears the summit, and the pines begin to show sterile reaches of rock and waste in their drawn-up files, there are signs of occasional departures from the main road, as if the weary traveler had at times succumbed to the long ascent, and turned aside for rest and breath again. The tired eyes of many a dusty passenger on the old overland coach have gazed wistfully on those sylvan openings, and imagined recesses of primeval shade and virgin wilderness in their dim perspectives. Had he descended, however, and followed one of these diverging paths, he would have come upon some rude wagon track, or "log-slide," leading from a clearing on the slope, or the ominous sawmill, half hidden in the forest it was slowly decimating. The woodland hush might have been broken by the sound of water passing over some unseen dam in the hollow, or the hiss of escaping steam and throb of an invisible engine in the covert.

Such, at least, was the experience of a young fellow of five-and-twenty, who, knapsack on back and stick in hand, had turned aside from the highway and entered the woods one pleasant afternoon in July. But he was evidently a deliberate pedestrian, and not a recent deposit of the proceeding stage-coach; and although his stout walking-shoes were covered with dust, he had neither the habitual slouch and slovenliness of the tramp, nor the hurried fatigue and growing negligence of an involuntary wayfarer. His clothes, which were strong and serviceable, were better

fitted for their present usage than the ordinary garments of the Californian travelers, which were too apt to be either above or below their requirements. But perhaps the stranger's greatest claim to originality was the absence of any weapon in his equipment. He carried neither rifle nor gun in his hand, and his narrow leathern belt was empty of either knife or revolver.

A half-mile from the main road, which seemed to him to have dropped out of sight the moment he had left it, he came upon a half-cleared area, where the hastily cut stumps of pines, of irregular height, bore an odd resemblance to the broken columns of some vast and ruined temple. A few fallen shafts, denuded of their bark and tessellated branches, sawn into symmetrical cylinders, lay beside the stumps, and lent themselves to the illusion. But the freshly cut chips, so damp that they still clung in layers to each other as they had fallen from the axe, and the stumps themselves, still wet and viscous from their drained life-blood, were redolent of an odor of youth and freshness.

The young man seated himself on one of the logs and deeply inhaled the sharp balsamic fragrance — albeit with a slight cough and a later hurried respiration. This, and a certain drawn look about his upper lip, seemed to indicate, in spite of his strength and color, some pulmonary weakness. He, however, rose after a moment's rest with undiminished energy and cheerfulness, readjusted his knapsack, and began to lightly pick his way across the fallen timber. A few paces on, the muffled whir of machinery became more audible, with the lazy, monotonous command of "Gee thar," from some unseen ox-driver. Presently the slow, deliberately swaying heads of a team of oxen emerged from the bushes, followed by the clanking chain of the "skids" of sawn planks, which they were ponderously dragging with that ostentatious submissiveness peculiar to their species. They had nearly passed him when

there was a sudden hitch in the procession. From where he stood he could see that a projecting plank had struck a pile of chips and become partly imbedded in it. To run to the obstruction and, with a few dexterous strokes and the leverage of his stout stick, dislodge the plank was the work not only of the moment but of an evidently energetic hand. The teamster looked back and merely nodded his appreciation, and with a "Gee up! Out of that, now!" the skids moved on.

"Much obliged, there!" said a hearty voice, as if supplementing the teamster's imperfect acknowledgment.

The stranger looked up. The voice came from the open, sashless, shutterless window of a rude building — a mere shell of boards and beams half hidden in the still leafy covert before him. He had completely overlooked it in his approach, even as he had ignored the nearer throbbing of the machinery, which was so violent as to impart a decided tremor to the slight edifice, and to shake the speaker so strongly that he was obliged while speaking to steady himself by the sashless frame of the window at which he stood. He had a face of good-natured and alert intelligence, a master's independence and authority of manner, in spite of his blue jean overalls and flannel shirt.

"Don't mention it," said the stranger, smiling with equal but more deliberate good humor. Then, seeing that his interlocutor still lingered a hospitable moment in spite of his quick eyes and the jarring impatience of the machinery, he added hesitatingly, "I fancy I 've wandered off the track a bit. Do you know a Mr. Bradley — somewhere here?"

The stranger's hesitation seemed to be more from some habitual conscientiousness of statement than awkwardness. The man in the window replied, "I 'm Bradley."

"Ah! Thank you: I 've a letter for you — somewhere. Here it is." He produced a note from his breast-

pocket. Bradley stooped to a sitting posture in the window. "Pitch it up." It was thrown and caught cleverly. Bradley opened it, read it hastily, smiled and nodded, glanced behind him as if to implore further delay from the impatient machinery, leaned perilously from the window, and said: —

"Look here! Do you see that silver-fir straight ahead?"

"Yes."

"A little to the left there 's a trail. Follow it and skirt along the edge of the cañon until you see my house. Ask for my wife — that 's Mrs. Bradley — and give her your letter. Stop!" He drew a carpenter's pencil from his pocket, scrawled two or three words across the open sheet, and tossed it back to the stranger. "See you at tea! Excuse me — Mr. Mainwaring — we 're short handed — and — the engine" — But here he disappeared suddenly.

Without glancing at the note again, the stranger quietly replaced it in his pocket, and struck out across the fallen trunks towards the silver-fir. He quickly found the trail indicated by Bradley, although it was faint and apparently worn by a single pair of feet as a shorter and private cut from some more traveled path. It was well for the stranger that he had a keen eye or he would have lost it; it was equally fortunate that he had a mountaineering instinct, for a sudden profound deepening of the blue mist seen dimly through the leaves before him caused him to slacken his steps. The trail bent abruptly to the right; a gulf fully two thousand feet deep was at his feet! It was the Great Cañon.

At the first glance it seemed so narrow that a rifle-shot could have crossed its tranquil depths; but a second look at the comparative size of the trees on the opposite mountain convinced him of his error. A nearer survey of the abyss also showed him that instead of its walls being perpendicular they were made of successive ledges or terraces

to the valley below. Yet the air was so still, and the outlines so clearly cut, that they might have been only the reflections of the mountains around him cast upon the placid mirror of a lake. The spectacle arrested him, as it arrested all men, by some occult power beyond the mere attraction of beauty or magnitude; even the teamster never passed it without the tribute of a stone or broken twig tossed into its immeasurable profundity.

Reluctantly leaving the spot, the stranger turned with the trail that now began to skirt its edge. This was no easy matter, as the undergrowth was very thick, and the foliage dense to the perilous brink of the precipice. He walked on, however, wondering why Bradley had chosen so circuitous and dangerous a route to his house, which naturally would be some distance back from the cañon. At the end of ten minutes' struggling through the "brush" the trail became vague, and, to all appearances, ended. Had he arrived? The thicket was as dense as before; through the interstices of leaf and spray he could see the blue void of the cañon at his side, and he even fancied that the foliage ahead of him was more symmetrical and less irregular, and was touched here and there with faint bits of color. To complete his utter mystification, a woman's voice, very fresh, very youthful, and by no means unmusical, rose apparently from the circumambient air. He looked hurriedly to the right and left, and even hopelessly into the trees above him.

"Yes," said the voice, as if renewing a suspended conversation, "it was too funny for anything. There were the two Missouri girls from Skinner's, with their auburn hair ringleted, my dear, like the old 'Books of Beauty' — in white frocks and sashes of an unripe greenish yellow, that puckered up your mouth like persimmons. One of them was speechless from good behavior, and the other — well! the other was so energetic she called out the figures

before the fiddler did, and shrieked to my *vis-à-vis* to dance up to the entire stranger — meaning *me*, if you please."

The voice appeared to come from the foliage that overhung the cañon, and the stranger even fancied he could detect through the shimmering leafy veil something that moved monotonously to and fro. Mystified and impatient, he made a hurried stride forward, his foot struck a wooden step, and the next moment the mystery was made clear. He had almost stumbled upon the end of a long veranda that projected over the abyss before a low, modern dwelling, till then invisible, nestling on its very brink. The symmetrically trimmed foliage he had noticed were the luxuriant madeira vines that hid the rude pillars of the veranda; the moving object was a rocking-chair, with its back towards the intruder, that disclosed only the brown hair above, and the white skirts and small slippered feet below, of a seated female figure. In the mean time, a second voice from the interior of the house had replied to the figure in the chair, who was evidently the first speaker : —

"It must have been very funny; but as long as Jim is always bringing somebody over from the mill, I don't see how *I* can go to those places. You were lucky, my dear, to escape from the new division superintendent last night; he was insufferable to Jim with his talk of his friend the San Francisco millionaire, and to me with his cheap society airs. I do hate a provincial fine gentleman."

The situation was becoming embarrassing to the intruder. At the apparition of the woman, the unaffected and simple directness he had previously shown in his equally abrupt contact with Bradley had fled utterly; confused by the awkwardness of his arrival, and shocked at the idea of overhearing a private conversation, he stepped hurriedly on the veranda.

"Well? go on!" said the second voice impatiently.

"Well, who else was there? *What* did you say? I don't hear you. What 's the matter?"

The seated figure had risen from her chair, and turned a young and pretty face somewhat superciliously towards the stranger, as she said in a low tone to her unseen auditor, "Hush! there is somebody here."

The young man came forward with an awkwardness that was more boyish than rustic. His embarrassment was not lessened by the simultaneous entrance from the open door of a second woman, apparently as young as and prettier than the first.

"I trust you 'll excuse me for — for — being so wretchedly stupid," he stammered, "but I really thought, you know, that — that — I was following the trail to — to — the front of the house, when I stumbled in — in here."

Long before he had finished, both women, by some simple feminine intuition, were relieved and even prepossessed by his voice and manner. They smiled graciously. The later-comer pointed to the empty chair. But with his habit of pertinacious conscientiousness the stranger continued, "It was regularly stupid, was n't it? — and I ought to have known better. I should have turned back and gone away when I found out what an ass I was likely to be, but I was — afraid — you know, of alarming you by the noise."

"Won't you sit down?" said the second lady pleasantly.

"Oh, thanks! I 've a letter here — I" — he transferred his stick and hat to his left hand as he felt in his breast-pocket with his right. But the action was so awkward that the stick dropped on the veranda. Both women made a movement to restore it to its embarrassed owner, who, however, quickly anticipated them. "Pray don't mind it," he continued, with accelerated breath and height-

ened color. "Ah, here 's the letter!" He produced the note Bradley had returned to him. "It 's mine, in fact — that is, I brought it to Mr. Bradley. He said I was to give it to —to — to — Mrs. Bradley." He paused, glancing embarrassedly from the one to the other.

"I 'm Mrs. Bradley," said the prettiest one, with a laugh. He handed her the letter. It ran as follows : —

DEAR BRADLEY, — Put Mr. Mainwaring through as far as he wants to go, or hang him up at The Lookout, just as he likes. The Bank 's behind him, and his hat 's chalked all over the Road; but he don't care much about being on velvet. That ain't his style — and you 'll like him. He 's somebody's son in England. B.

Mrs. Bradley glanced simply at the first sentence. "Pray sit down, Mr. Mainwaring," she said gently; "or, rather, let me first introduce my cousin — Miss Macy."

"Thanks," said Mainwaring, with a bow to Miss Macy, "but I — I — I — think," he added conscientiously, "you did not notice that your husband had written something across the paper."

Mrs. Bradley smiled, and glanced at her husband's indorsement — "All right. Wade in." "It 's nothing but Jim's slang," she said, with a laugh and a slightly heightened color. "He ought not to have sent you by that short cut; it 's a bother, and even dangerous for a stranger. If you had come directly to *us* by the road, without making your first call at the mill," she added, with a touch of coquetry, "you would have had a pleasanter walk, and seen *us* sooner. I suppose, however, you got off the stage at the mill?"

"I was not on the coach," said Mainwaring, unfastening the strap of his knapsack. "I walked over from Lone Pine Flat."

"Walked!" echoed both women in simultaneous astonishment.

"Yes," returned Mainwaring simply, laying aside his burden and taking the proffered seat. "It 's a very fine bit of country."

"Why, it 's fifteen miles," said Mrs. Bradley, glancing horror-stricken at her cousin. "How dreadful! And to think Jim could have sent you a horse to Lone Pine. Why, you must be dead!"

"Thanks, I 'm all right! I rather enjoyed it, you know."

"But," said Miss Macy, glancing wonderingly at his knapsack, "you must want something, a change — or some refreshment — after fifteen miles."

"Pray don't disturb yourself," said Mainwaring, rising hastily, but not quickly enough to prevent the young girl from slipping past him into the house, whence she rapidly returned with a decanter and glasses.

"Perhaps Mr. Mainwaring would prefer to go into Jim's room and wash his hands and put on a pair of slippers?" said Mrs. Bradley, with gentle concern.

"Thanks, no. I really am not tired. I sent some luggage yesterday by the coach to the Summit Hotel," he said, observing the women's eyes still fixed upon his knapsack. "I dare say I can get them if I want them. I 've got a change here," he continued, lifting the knapsack as if with a sudden sense of its incongruity with its surroundings, and depositing it on the end of the veranda.

"Do let it remain where it is," said Mrs. Bradley, greatly amused, "and pray sit still and take some refreshment. You 'll make yourself ill after your exertions," she added, with a charming assumption of matronly solicitude.

"But I 'm not at all deserving of your sympathy," said Mainwaring, with a laugh. "I 'm awfully fond of walking, and my usual constitutional is n't much under this."

"Perhaps you were stronger than you are now," said Mrs. Bradley, gazing at him with a frank curiosity that, however, brought a faint deepening of color to his cheek.

"I dare say you 're right," he said suddenly, with an apologetic smile. "I quite forgot that I 'm a sort of an invalid, you know, traveling for my health. I 'm not very strong here," he added, lightly tapping his chest, that now, relieved of the bands of his knapsack, appeared somewhat thin and hollow in spite of his broad shoulders. His voice, too, had become less clear and distinct.

Mrs. Bradley, who was still watching him, here rose potentially. "You ought to take more care of yourself," she said. "You should begin by eating this biscuit, drinking that glass of whiskey, and making yourself more comfortable in Jim's room until we can get the spare room fixed a little."

"But I am not to be sent to bed — am I?" asked Mainwaring in half-real, half-amused consternation.

"I 'm not so sure of that," said Mrs. Bradley, with playful precision. "But for the present we 'll let you off with a good wash and a nap afterwards in that rocking-chair, while my cousin and I make some little domestic preparations. You see," she added, with a certain proud humility, "we 've got only one servant — a Chinaman, and there are many things we can't leave to him."

The color again rose in Mainwaring's cheek, but he had tact enough to reflect that any protest or hesitation on his part at that moment would only increase the difficulties of his gentle entertainers. He allowed himself to be ushered into the house by Mrs. Bradley, and shown to her husband's room, without perceiving that Miss Macy had availed herself of his absence to run to the end of the veranda, mischievously try to lift the discarded knapsack to her own pretty shoulder, but, failing, heroically stagger with it into the passage and softly deposit it at his door.

This done, she pantingly rejoined her cousin in the kitchen.

"Well," said Mrs. Bradley emphatically. "*Did* you ever? Walking fifteen miles for pleasure — and with such lungs!"

"And that knapsack!" added Louise Macy, pointing to the mark in her little palm where the strap had imbedded itself in the soft flesh.

"He 's nice, though; is n't he?" said Mrs. Bradley tentatively.

"Yes," said Miss Macy, "he is n't, certainly, one of those provincial fine gentlemen you object to. But *did* you see his shoes? I suppose they make the miles go quickly, or seem to measure less by comparison."

"They 're probably more serviceable than those high-heeled things that Captain Greyson hops about in."

"But the captain always rides — and rides very well — you know," said Louise reflectively. There was a moment's pause.

"I suppose Jim will tell us all about him," said Mrs. Bradley, dismissing the subject, as she turned her sleeves back over her white arms, preparatory to grappling certain culinary difficulties.

"Jim," observed Miss Macy shortly, "in my opinion, knows nothing more than his note says. That 's like Jim."

"There 's nothing more to know, really," said Mrs. Bradley, with a superior air. "He 's undoubtedly the son of some Englishman of fortune, sent out here for his health."

"Hush!"

Miss Macy had heard a step in the passage. It halted at last, half irresolutely, before the open door of the kitchen, and the stranger appeared with an embarrassed air. But in his brief absence he seemed to have completely

groomed himself, and stood there, the impersonation of close-cropped, clean, and wholesome English young manhood. The two women appreciated it with catlike fastidiousness.

"I beg your pardon; but really you 're going to let a fellow do something for you," he said, "just to keep him from looking like a fool. I really can do no end of things, you know, if you 'll try me. I 've done some camping-out, and can cook as well as the next man."

The two women made a movement of smiling remonstrance, half coquettish, and half superior, until Mrs. Bradley, becoming conscious of her bare arms and the stranger's wandering eyes, colored faintly, and said with more decision: —

"Certainly not. You 'd only be in the way. Besides, you need rest more than we do. Put yourself in the rocking-chair in the veranda, and go to sleep until Mr. Bradley comes."

Mainwaring saw that she was serious, and withdrew, a little ashamed at the familiarity into which his boyishness had betrayed him. But he had scarcely seated himself in the rocking-chair before Miss Macy appeared, carrying with both hands a large tin basin of unshelled peas.

"There," she said pantingly, placing her burden in his lap, "if you really want to help, there 's something to do that is n't very fatiguing. You may shell these peas."

"*Shell* them — I beg pardon, but how?" he asked, with smiling earnestness.

"How? Why, I 'll show you — look."

She frankly stepped beside him, so close that her full-skirted dress half encompassed him and the basin in a delicious confusion, and, leaning over his lap, with her left hand picked up a pea-cod, which, with a single movement of her charming little right thumb, she broke at the end, and stripped the green shallow of its tiny treasures.

He watched her with smiling eyes; her own, looking down on him, were very bright and luminous. "There, that 's easy enough," she said, and turned away.

"But — one moment, Miss — Miss — "

"Macy," said Louise.

"Where am I to put the shells?"

"Oh! throw them down there — there 's room enough."

She was pointing to the cañon below. The veranda actually projected over its brink, and seemed to hang in mid air above it. Mainwaring almost mechanically threw his arm out to catch the incautious girl, who had stepped heedlessly to its extreme edge.

"How odd! Don't you find it rather dangerous here?" he could not help saying. "I mean — you might have had a railing that would n't intercept the view and yet be safe?"

"It 's a fancy of Mr. Bradley's," returned the young girl carelessly. "It 's all like this. The house was built on a ledge against the side of the precipice, and the road suddenly drops down to it."

"It 's tremendously pretty, all the same, you know," said the young man thoughtfully, gazing, however, at the girl's rounded chin above him.

"Yes," she replied curtly. "But this is n't working. I must go back to Jenny. You can shell the peas until Mr. Bradley comes home. He won't be long."

She turned away, and reëntered the house. Without knowing why, he thought her withdrawal abrupt, and he was again feeling his ready color rise with the suspicion of either having been betrayed by the young girl's innocent fearlessness into some unpardonable familiarity, which she had quietly resented, or of feeling an ease and freedom in the company of these two women that were inconsistent with respect, and should be restrained.

He, however, began to apply himself to the task given to him with his usual conscientiousness of duty, and pre-

sently acquired a certain manual dexterity in the operation. It was "good fun" to throw the cast-off husks into the mighty unfathomable void before him, and watch them linger with suspended gravity in mid air for a moment — apparently motionless — until they either lost themselves, a mere vanishing black spot in the thin ether, or slid suddenly at a sharp angle into unknown shadow. How deuced odd for him to be sitting here in this fashion! It would be something to talk of hereafter, and yet — he stopped — it was not at all in the line of that characteristic adventure, uncivilized novelty, and barbarous freedom which for the last month he had sought and experienced. It was not at all like his meeting with the grizzly last week while wandering in a lonely cañon; not a bit in the line of his chance acquaintance with that notorious ruffian, Spanish Jack, or his witnessing with his own eyes that actual lynching affair at Angels. No! Nor was it at all characteristic, according to his previous ideas of frontier rural seclusion — as, for instance, the Pike County cabin of the family where he stayed one night, and where the handsome daughter asked him what his Christian name was. No! These two young women were very unlike her; they seemed really quite the equals of his family and friends in England, — perhaps more attractive, — and yet, yes, it was this very attractiveness that alarmed his inbred social conservatism regarding women. With a man it was very different; that alert, active, intelligent husband, instinct with the throbbing life of his sawmill, creator and worker in one, challenged his unqualified trust and admiration.

He had become conscious for the last minute or two of thinking rapidly and becoming feverishly excited; of breathing with greater difficulty, and a renewed tendency to cough. The tendency increased until he instinctively put aside the pan from his lap and half rose. But even that slight exertion brought on an accession of coughing.

He put his handkerchief to his lips, partly to keep the sound from disturbing the women in the kitchen, partly because of a certain significant taste in his mouth which he unpleasantly remembered. When he removed the handkerchief it was, as he expected, spotted with blood. He turned quickly and reëntered the house softly, regaining the bedroom without attracting attention. An increasing faintness here obliged him to lie down on the bed until it should pass.

Everything was quiet. He hoped they would not discover his absence from the veranda until he was better; it was deucedly awkward that he should have had this attack just now — and after he had made so light of his previous exertions. They would think him an effeminate fraud, these two bright, active women and that alert, energetic man. A faint color came into his cheek at the idea, and an uneasy sense that he had been in some way foolishly imprudent about his health. Again, they might be alarmed at missing him from the veranda; perhaps he had better have remained there; perhaps he ought to tell them that he had concluded to take their advice and lie down. He tried to rise, but the deep blue chasm before the window seemed to be swelling up to meet him, the bed slowly sinking into its oblivious profundity. He knew no more.

He came to with the smell and taste of some powerful volatile spirit, and the vague vision of Mr. Bradley still standing at the window of the mill and vibrating with the machinery; this changed presently to a pleasant lassitude and lazy curiosity as he perceived Mr. Bradley smile and apparently slip from the window of the mill to his bedside.

"You 're all right now," said Bradley cheerfully.

He was feeling Mainwaring's pulse. Had he really been ill and was Bradley a doctor?

Bradley evidently saw what was passing in his mind. "Don't be alarmed," he said gayly. "I 'm not a doctor,

but I practice a little medicine and surgery on account of the men at the mill, and accidents, you know. You 're all right now; you 've lost a little blood: but in a couple of weeks in this air we 'll have that tubercle healed, and you 'll be as right as a trivet."

"In a couple of weeks!" echoed Mainwaring in faint astonishment. "Why, I leave here to-morrow."

"You 'll do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Bradley, with smiling peremptoriness, suddenly slipping out from behind her husband. "Everything is all perfectly arranged. Jim has sent off messengers to your friends, so that if you can't come to them, they can come to you. You see, you can't help yourself! If you *will* walk fifteen miles with such lungs, and then frighten people to death, you must abide by the consequences."

"You see, the old lady has fixed you," said Bradley, smiling; "and she 's the master here. Come, Mainwaring, you can send any other message you like, and have who and what you want here; but *here* you must stop for a while."

"But did I frighten you really?" stammered Mainwaring faintly to Mrs. Bradley.

"Frighten us!" said Mrs. Bradley. "Well, look there!"

She pointed to the window, which commanded a view of the veranda. Miss Macy had dropped into the vacant chair, with her little feet stretched out before her, her cheeks burning with heat and fire, her eyes partly closed, her straw hat hanging by a ribbon round her neck, her brown hair clinging to her ears and forehead in damp tendrils, and an enormous palm-leaf fan in each hand violently playing upon this charming picture of exhaustion and abandonment.

"She came tearing down to the mill, barebacked on our half-broken mustang, about half an hour ago, to call me 'to help you,'" explained Bradley. "Heaven knows how she managed to do it!"

CHAPTER II

The medication of the woods was not overestimated by Bradley. There was surely some occult healing property in that vast reservoir of balmy and resinous odors over which The Lookout beetled and clung, and from which at times the pure exhalations of the terraced valley seemed to rise. Under its remedial influence and a conscientious adherence to the rules of absolute rest and repose laid down for him, Mainwaring had no return of the hemorrhage. The nearest professional medical authority, hastily summoned, saw no reason for changing or for supplementing Bradley's intelligent and simple treatment, although astounded that the patient had been under no more radical or systematic cure than travel and exercise. The women especially were amazed that Mainwaring had taken "nothing for it," in their habitual experience of an unfettered pill-and-elixir consuming democracy. In their knowledge of the thousand "panaceas" that filled the shelves of the general store, this singular abstention of their guest seemed to indicate a national peculiarity.

His bed was moved beside the low window, from which he could not only view the veranda, but converse at times with its occupants, and even listen to the book which Miss Macy, seated without, read aloud to him. In the evening Bradley would linger by his couch until late, beguiling the tedium of his convalescence with characteristic stories and information which he thought might please the invalid. For Mainwaring, who had been early struck with Bradley's ready and cultivated intelligence, ended by shyly avoiding

the discussion of more serious topics, partly because Bradley impressed him with a suspicion of his own inferiority, and partly because Mainwaring questioned the taste of Bradley's apparent exhibition of his manifest superiority. He learned accidentally that this mill-owner and backwoodsman was a college-bred man; but the practical application of that education to the ordinary affairs of life was new to the young Englishman's traditions, and grated a little harshly on his feelings. He would have been quite content if Bradley had, like himself and fellows he knew, undervalued his training, and kept his gifts conservatively impractical. The knowledge also that his host's education naturally came from some provincial institution unlike Oxford and Cambridge may have unconsciously affected his general estimate. I say unconsciously, for his strict conscientiousness would have rejected any such formal proposition.

Another trifle annoyed him. He could not help noticing also that although Bradley's manner and sympathy were confidential and almost brotherly, he never made any allusion to Mainwaring's own family or connections, and, in fact, gave no indication of what he believed was the national curiosity in regard to strangers. Somewhat embarrassed by this indifference, Mainwaring made the occasion of writing some letters home an opportunity for laughingly alluding to the fact that he had made his mother and his sisters fully aware of the great debt they owed the household of The Lookout.

"They 'll probably all send you a round robin of thanks, except, perhaps, my next brother, Bob." Bradley contented himself with a gesture of general deprecation, and did not ask *why* Mainwaring's young brother should contemplate his death with satisfaction. Nevertheless, some time afterwards Miss Macy remarked that it seemed hard that the happiness of one member of a family should

depend upon a calamity to another. "As for instance?" asked Mainwaring, who had already forgotten the circumstance. "Why, if you had died and your younger brother succeeded to the baronetcy, and become Sir Robert Mainwaring," responded Miss Macy, with precision. This was the first and only allusion to his family and prospective rank. On the other hand, he had — through naïve and boyish inquiries, which seemed to amuse his entertainers — acquired, as he believed, a full knowledge of the history and antecedents of the Bradley household. He knew how Bradley had brought his young wife and her cousin to California and abandoned a lucrative law practice in San Francisco to take possession of this mountain mill and woodland, which he had acquired through some professional service.

"Then you are a barrister really?" said Mainwaring gravely.

Bradley laughed. "I 'm afraid I 've had more practice — though not as lucrative a one — as surgeon or doctor."

"But you 're regularly on the rolls, you know; you 're entered as counsel, and all that sort of thing?" continued Mainwaring, with great seriousness.

"Well, yes," replied Bradley, much amused. "I 'm afraid I must plead guilty to that."

"It 's not a bad sort of thing," said Mainwaring naïvely, ignoring Bradley's amusement. "I 've got a cousin who 's gone in for the law. Got out of the army to do it — too. He 's a sharp fellow."

"Then you *do* allow a man to try many trades — over there," said Miss Macy demurely.

"Yes, sometimes," said Mainwaring graciously, but by no means certain that the case was at all analogous.

Nevertheless, as if relieved of certain doubts of the conventional quality of his host's attainments, he now gave himself up to a very hearty and honest admiration of Brad-

ley. "You know it 's awfully kind of him to talk to a fellow like me who just pulled through, and never got any prizes at Oxford, and don't understand the half of these things," he remarked confidentially to Mrs. Bradley. "He knows more about the things we used to go in for at Oxford than lots of our men, and he 's never been there. He 's uncommonly clever."

"Jim was always very brilliant," returned Mrs. Bradley indifferently, and with more than even conventionally polite wifely deprecation; "I wish he were more practical."

"Practical! Oh, I say, Mrs. Bradley! Why, a fellow that can go in among a lot of workmen and tell them just what to do — an all-round chap that can be independent of his valet, his doctor, and his — banker! By Jove — *that 's* practical!"

"I mean," said Mrs. Bradley coldly, "that there are some things that a gentleman ought not to be practical about nor independent of. Mr. Bradley would have done better to have used his talents in some more legitimate and established way."

Mainwaring looked at her in genuine surprise. To his inexperienced observation Bradley's intelligent energy and, above all, his originality, ought to have been priceless in the eyes of his wife — the American female of his species. He felt that slight shock which most loyal or logical men feel when first brought face to face with the easy disloyalty and incomprehensible logic of the feminine affections. Here was a fellow, by Jove, that any woman ought to be proud of, and — and — he stopped blankly. He wondered if Miss Macy sympathized with her cousin.

Howbeit, this did not affect the charm of their idyllic life at The Lookout. The precipice over which they hung was as charming as ever in its poetic illusions of space and depth and color; the isolation of their comfortable existence in the tasteful yet audacious habitation, the pleasant

routine of daily tasks and amusements, all tended to make the enforced quiet and inaction of his convalescence a lazy recreation. He was really improving; more than that, he was conscious of a certain satisfaction in this passive observation of novelty that was healthier and perhaps *truer* than his previous passion for adventure and that febrile desire for change and excitement which he now felt was a part of his disease. Nor were incident and variety entirely absent from this tranquil experience. He was one day astonished at being presented by Bradley with copies of the latest English newspapers, procured from Sacramento, and he equally astonished his host, after profusely thanking him, by only listlessly glancing at their columns. He estopped a proposed visit from one of his influential countrymen; in the absence of his fair entertainers at their domestic duties, he extracted infinite satisfaction from Foo-Yup, the Chinese servant, who was particularly detached for his service. From his invalid coign of vantage at the window he was observant of all that passed upon the veranda, that *al-fresco* audience-room of The Lookout, and he was good-humoredly conscious that a great many eccentric and peculiar visitors were invariably dragged thither by Miss Macy, and goaded into characteristic exhibition within sight and hearing of her guest, with a too evident view, under the ostentatious excuse of extending his knowledge of national character, of mischievously shocking him. "When you are strong enough to stand Captain Gashweiler's opinions of the Established Church and Chinamen," said Miss Macy, after one of those revelations, "I 'll get Jim to bring him here, for really he swears so outrageously that even in the broadest interests of international understanding and good will neither Mrs. Bradley nor myself could be present."

On another occasion she provokingly lingered before his window for a moment with a rifle slung jauntily over her

shoulder. "If you hear a shot or two don't excite yourself, and believe we 're having a lynching case in the woods. It will be only me. There 's some creature — confess, you expected me to say 'critter' — hanging round the barn. It may be a bear. Good-by." She missed the creature, — which happened to be really a bear, — much to Mainwaring's illogical satisfaction. "I wonder why," he reflected, with vague uneasiness, "she does n't leave all that sort of thing to girls like that tow-headed girl at the blacksmith's."

It chanced, however, that this blacksmith's tow-headed daughter, who, it may be incidentally remarked, had the additional eccentricities of large black eyes and large white teeth, came to the fore in quite another fashion. Shortly after this, Mainwaring being able to leave his room and join the family board, Mrs. Bradley found it necessary to enlarge her domestic service, and arranged with her nearest neighbor, the blacksmith, to allow his daughter to come to The Lookout for a few days to "do the chores" and assist in the housekeeping, as she had on previous occasions. The day of her advent Bradley entered Mainwaring's room, and closing the door mysteriously, fixed his blue eyes, kindling with mischief, on the young Englishman.

"You are aware, my dear boy," he began, with affected gravity, "that you are now living in a land of liberty, where mere artificial distinctions are not known, and where Freedom from her mountain heights generally levels all social positions. I think you have graciously admitted that fact."

"I know I 've been taking a tremendous lot of freedom with you and yours, old man, and it 's a deuced shame," interrupted Mainwaring, with a faint smile.

"And that nowhere," continued Bradley, with immovable features, "does equality exist as perfectly as above yonder unfathomable abyss, where you have also, doubtless,

observed the American eagle proudly soars and screams defiance."

"Then that was the fellow that kept me awake this morning, and made me wonder if I was strong enough to hold a gun again."

"That would n't have settled the matter," continued Bradley imperturbably. "The case is simply this: Miss Minty Sharpe, that blacksmith's daughter, has once or twice consented, for a slight emolument, to assist in our domestic service for a day or two, and she comes back again to-day. Now, under the ægis of that noble bird whom your national instincts tempt you to destroy, she has on all previous occasions taken her meals with us, at the same table, on terms of perfect equality. She will naturally expect to do the same now. Mrs. Bradley thought it proper, therefore, to warn you, that, in case your health was not quite equal to this democratic simplicity, you could still dine in your room."

"It would be great fun — if Miss Sharpe won't object to my presence."

"But it must not be 'great fun,'" replied Bradley, more seriously; "for Miss Minty's perception of humor is probably as keen as yours, and she would be quick to notice it. And so far from having any objection to you, I am inclined to think that we owe her consent to come to her desire of making your acquaintance."

"She will find my conduct most exemplary," said Mainwaring earnestly.

"Let us hope so," concluded Bradley, with unabated gravity. "And now that you have consented, let me add from my own experience that Miss Minty's lemon pies alone are worthy of any concession."

The dinner hour came. Mainwaring, a little pale and interesting, leaning on the arm of Bradley, crossed the hall, and for the first time entered the dining-room of the house

where he had lodged for three weeks. It was a bright, cheerful apartment, giving upon the laurels of the rocky hillside, and permeated, like the rest of the house, with the wholesome spice of the valley — an odor that, in its pure desiccating property, seemed to obliterate all flavor of alien human habitation, and even to dominate and ethereal-ize the appetizing smell of the viands before them. The bare, shining, planed, boarded walls appeared to resent any decoration that might have savored of dust, decay, or moisture. The four large windows and long, open door, set in scanty strips of the plainest spotless muslin, framed in themselves pictures of woods and rock and sky of limitless depth, color, and distance, that made all other adornment impertinent. Nature, invading the room at every opening, had banished Art from those neutral walls.

"It 's like a picnic, with comfort," said Mainwaring, glancing round him with boyish appreciation. Miss Minty was not yet there; the Chinaman was alone in attendance. Mainwaring could not help whispering, half mischievously, to Louise, "You draw the line at Chinamen, I suppose?"

"*We* don't, but *he* does," answered the young girl. "He considers us his social inferiors. But — hush!"

Minty Sharpe had just entered the room, and was advancing with smiling confidence towards the table. Mainwaring was a little startled; he had seen Minty in a holland sunbonnet and turned-up skirt crossing the veranda, only a moment before; in the brief instant between the dishing-up of dinner and its actual announcement she had managed to change her dress, put on a clean collar, cuffs, and a large jet brooch, and apply some odorous unguent to her rebellious hair. Her face, guiltless of powder or cold cream, was still shining with the healthy perspiration of her last labors as she promptly took the vacant chair beside Mainwaring.

"Don't mind me, folks," she said cheerfully, resting her plump elbow on the table, and addressing the company generally, but gazing with frank curiosity into the face of the young man at her side. "It was a keen jump, I tell yer, to get out of my old duds inter these, and look decent inside o' five minutes. But I reckon I ain't kept yer waitin' long — least of all this yer sick stranger. But you 're looking pearter than you did. You 're wonderin' like ez not where I ever saw ye before?" she continued, laughing. "Well, I 'll tell you. Last week! I 'd kem over yer on a chance of seein' Jenny Bradley; and while I was meanderin' down the veranda I saw you lyin' back in your chair by the window drowned in sleep, like a baby. Lordy! I mout hev won a pair o' gloves, but I reckoned you were Loo's game, and not mine."

The slightly constrained laugh which went round the table after Miss Minty's speech was due quite as much to the faint flush that had accented Mainwaring's own smile as to the embarrassing remark itself. Mrs. Bradley and Miss Macy exchanged rapid glances. Bradley, who alone retained his composure, with a slight flicker of amusement in the corner of his eye and nostril, said quickly: "You see, Mainwaring, how nature stands ready to help your convalescence at every turn. If Miss Minty had only followed up her healing opportunity, your cure would have been complete."

"Ye mout hev left some o' that pretty talk for *him* to say," said Minty, taking up her knife and fork with a slight shrug, "and you need n't call me *Miss* Minty either, jest because there 's kempeny present."

"I hope you won't look upon me as company, Minty, or I shall be obliged to call you 'Miss' too," said Mainwaring, unexpectedly regaining his usual frankness.

Bradley's face brightened; Miss Minty raised her black eyes from her plate with still broader appreciation.

"There 's nothin' mean about that," she said, showing her white teeth. "Well, what 's *your* first name?"

"Not as pretty as yours, I 'm afraid. It 's Frank."

"No, it ain't, it 's Francis! You reckon to be Sir Francis some day," she said gravely. "You can't play any Frank off on me. You would n't do it on *her*," she added, indicating Louise with her elbow.

A momentous silence followed. The particular form that Minty's vulgarity had taken had not been anticipated by the two other women. They had, not unreasonably, expected some original audacity or *gaucherie* from the blacksmith's daughter, which might astonish yet amuse their guest, and condone for the situation forced upon them. But they were not prepared for a playfulness that involved themselves in a ridiculous indiscretion. Mrs. Bradley's eyes sought her husband's meaningly; Louise's pretty mouth hardened. Luckily the cheerful cause of it suddenly jumped up from the table, and saying that the stranger was starving, insisted upon bringing a dish from the other side and helping him herself plentifully. Mainwaring rose gallantly to take the dish from her hand; a slight scuffle ensued which ended in the young man being forced down in his chair by the pressure of Minty's strong plump hand on his shoulder. "There," she said, "ye kin mind your dinner now, and I reckon we 'll give the others a chance to chip into the conversation," and at once applied herself to the plate before her.

The conversation presently became general, with the exception that Minty, more or less engrossed by professional anxiety in the quality of the dinner and occasional hurried visits to the kitchen, briefly answered the few polite remarks which Mainwaring felt called upon to address to her. Nevertheless, he was conscious, *malgré* her rallying allusions to Miss Macy, that he felt none of the vague yet half-pleasant anxiety with which Louise was beginning to inspire

him. He felt at ease in Minty's presence, and believed, rightly or wrongly, that she understood him as well as he understood her. And there were certainly points in common between his two hostesses and their humbler though proud dependent. The social evolution of Mrs. Bradley and Louise Macy from some previous Minty was neither remote nor complete; the self-sufficient independence, ease, and quiet self-assertion were alike in each. The superior position was still too recent and accidental for either to resent or criticise qualities that were common to both. At least, this was what he thought when not abandoning himself to the gratification of a convalescent appetite; to the presence of two pretty women, the sympathy of a genial friend, the healthy intoxication of the white sunlight that glanced upon the pine walls, the views that mirrored themselves in the open windows, and the pure atmosphere in which The Lookout seemed to swim. Wandering breezes of balm and spice lightly stirred the flowers on the table, and seemed to fan his hair and forehead with softly healing breath. Looking up in an interval of silence, he caught Bradley's gray eyes fixed upon him with a subdued light of amusement and affection, as of an elder brother regarding a schoolboy's boisterous appetite at some feast. Mainwaring laid down his knife and fork with a laughing color, touched equally by Bradley's fraternal kindliness and the consciousness of his gastronomical powers.

"Hang it, Bradley; look here! I know my appetite 's disgraceful, but what can a fellow do? In such air, with such viands and such company! It 's like the bees getting drunk on Hybla and Hymettus, you know. I 'm not responsible!"

"It 's the first square meal I believe you 've really eaten in six months," said Bradley gravely. "I can't understand why your doctor allowed you to run down so dreadfully."

"I reckon you ain't as keerful of yourself, you Britishers, ez us," said Minty. "Lordy! Why, there 's pop invests in more patent medicines in one day than you have in two weeks, and he 'd make two of you. Mebbe your folks don't look after you enough."

"I 'm a splendid advertisement of what *your* care and your medicines have done," said Mainwaring gratefully to Mrs. Bradley; "and if you ever want to set up a 'Cure' here, I 'm ready with a ten-page testimonial."

"Have a care, Mainwaring," said Bradley, laughing, "that the ladies don't take you at your word. Louise and Jenny have been doing their best for the last year to get me to accept a flattering offer from a Sacramento firm to put up a hotel for tourists on the site of The Lookout. Why, I believe that they have already secretly in their hearts concocted a flaming prospectus of 'Unrivaled Scenery' and 'Health-giving Air,' and are looking forward to Saturday night hops on the piazza."

"Have you really, though?" said Mainwaring, gazing from the one to the other.

"We should certainly see more company than we do now, and feel a little less out of the world," said Louise candidly. "There are no neighbors here — I mean the people at the Summit are not," she added, with a slight glance towards Minty.

"And Mr. Bradley would find it more profitable — not to say more suitable to a man of his position — than this wretched sawmill and timber business," said Mrs. Bradley decidedly.

Mainwaring was astounded; was it possible they considered it more dignified for a lawyer to keep a hotel than a sawmill? Bradley, as if answering what was passing in his mind, said mischievously, "I 'm not sure, exactly, what my position is, my dear, and I 'm afraid I 've declined the hotel on business principles. But, by the way, Mainwar

ing, I found a letter at the mill this morning from Mr. Richardson. He is about to pay us the distinguished honor of visiting The Lookout, solely on your account, my dear fellow."

"But I wrote him that I was much better, and it was n't necessary for him to come," said Mainwaring.

"He makes an excuse of some law business with me. I suppose he considers the mere fact of his taking the trouble to come here, all the way from San Francisco, a sufficient honor to justify any absence of formal invitation," said Bradley, smiling.

"But he 's only — I mean he 's my father's banker," said Mainwaring, correcting himself, "and — you don't keep a hotel."

"Not yet," returned Bradley, with a mischievous glance at the two women, "but The Lookout is elastic, and I dare say we can manage to put him up."

A silence ensued. It seemed as if some shadow, or momentary darkening of the brilliant atmosphere, some film across the mirror-like expanse of the open windows, or misty dimming of their wholesome light, had arisen to their elevation. Mainwaring felt that he was looking forward with unreasoning indignation and uneasiness to this impending interruption of their idyllic life; Mrs. Bradley and Louise, who had become a little more constrained and formal under Minty's freedom, were less sympathetic; even the irrepressible Minty appeared absorbed in the responsibilities of the dinner.

Bradley alone preserved his usual patient good humor. "We 'll take our coffee on the veranda, and the ladies will join us by and by, Mainwaring; besides, I don't know that I can allow you, as an invalid, to go entirely through Minty's bountiful *menu* at present. You shall have the sweets another time."

When they were alone on the veranda, he said, between

the puffs of his black brierwood pipe, — a pet aversion of Mrs. Bradley, — "I wonder how Richardson will accept Minty!"

"If *I* can, I think he *must*," returned Mainwaring dryly. "By Jove, it will be great fun to see him; but" — he stopped and hesitated — "I don't know about the ladies. I don't think, you know, that they 'll stand Minty again before another stranger."

Bradley glanced quickly at the young man; their eyes met, and they both joined in a superior and I fear disloyal smile. After a pause Bradley, as if in a spirit of further confidence, took his pipe from his mouth and pointed to the blue abyss before them.

"Look at that profundity, Mainwaring, and think of it ever being bullied and overawed by a long veranda-load of gaping, patronizing tourists and the idiotic flirting females of their species. Think of a lot of overdressed creatures flouting those severe outlines and deep-toned distances with frippery and garishness. You know how you have been lulled to sleep by that delicious, indefinite, far-off murmur of the cañon at night — think of it being broken by a crazy waltz or a monotonous german — by the clatter of waiters and the pop of champagne corks. And yet, by thunder, those women are capable of liking both and finding no discord in them!"

"Dancing ain't half bad, you know," said Mainwaring conscientiously, "if a chap 's got the wind to do it; and all Americans, especially the women, dance better than we do. But I say, Bradley, to hear you talk, a fellow would n't suspect you were as big a Vandal as anybody, with a beastly, howling sawmill in the heart of the primeval forest. By Jove, you quite bowled me over that first day we met when you popped your head out of that delirium tremens shaking mill, like the very genius of destructive improvement."

"But that was *fighting* Nature, not patronizing her;

and it 's a business that pays. That reminds me that I must go back to it," said Bradley, rising and knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"Not *after* dinner, surely!" said Mainwaring in surprise. "Come, now, that 's too much like the bolting Yankee of the travelers' book."

"There 's a heavy run to get through to-night. We 're working against time," returned Bradley. Even while speaking he had vanished within the house, returned quickly — having replaced his dark suit by jean trousers tucked in heavy boots, and a red flannel shirt over his starched white one — and nodding gayly to Mainwaring, stepped from the lower end of the veranda. "The beggar actually looks pleased to go," said Mainwaring to himself in wonderment.

"Oh! Jim," said Mrs. Bradley, appearing at the door.

"Yes," said Bradley faintly from the bushes.

"Minty 's ready. You might take her home."

"All right. I 'll wait."

"I hope I have n't frightened Miss Sharpe away," said Mainwaring. "She isn't going surely?"

"Only to get some better clothes on account of company. I 'm afraid you are giving her a good deal of trouble, Mr. Mainwaring," said Mrs. Bradley, laughing.

"She wished me to say good-by to you for her, as she could n't come on the veranda in her old shawl and sunbonnet," added Louise, who had joined them. "What do you really think of her, Mr. Mainwaring? I call her quite pretty at times. Don't you?"

Mainwaring knew not what to say. He could not understand why they could have any special interest in the girl, or care to know what he, a perfect stranger, thought of her. He avoided a direct reply, however, by playfully wondering how Mrs. Bradley could subject her husband to Miss Minty's undivided fascinations.

"Oh, Jim always takes her home — if it 's in the evening. He gets along with these people better than we do," returned Mrs. Bradley dryly. "But," she added, with a return of her piquant Quaker-like coquettishness, "Jim says we are to devote ourselves to you to-night — in retaliation, I suppose. We are to amuse you, and not let you get excited; and you are to be sent to bed early."

It is to be feared that these latter wise precautions — invaluable for all defenseless and enfeebled humanity — were not carried out: and it was late when Mainwaring eventually retired, with brightened eyes and a somewhat accelerated pulse. For the ladies, who had quite regained that kindly equanimity which Minty had rudely interrupted, had also added a delicate and confidential sympathy in their relations with Mainwaring, — as of people who had suffered in common, — and he experienced these tender attentions at their hands which any two women are emboldened by each other's saving presence to show any single member of our sex. Indeed, he hardly knew if his satisfaction was the more complete when Mrs. Bradley, withdrawing for a few moments, left him alone on the veranda with Louise and the vast, omnipotent night.

For a while they sat silent, in the midst of the profound and measureless calm. Looking down upon the dim moonlit abyss at their feet, they themselves seemed a part of this night that arched above it; the half-risen moon appeared to linger long enough at their side to enwrap and suffuse them with its glory; a few bright stars quietly ringed themselves around them, and looked wonderingly into the level of their own shining eyes. For some vague yearning to humanity seemed to draw this dark and passionless void towards them. The vast protecting maternity of Nature leant hushed and breathless over the solitude. Warm currents of air rose occasionally from the valley, which one might have believed were sighs from its full and

overflowing breast, or a grateful coolness swept their cheeks and hair when the tranquil heights around them were moved to slowly respond. Odors from invisible bay and laurel sometimes filled the air; the incense of some rare and remoter cultivated meadow beyond their ken, or the strong germinating breath of leagues of wild oats, that had yellowed the upland by day. In the silence and shadow, their voices took upon themselves, almost without their volition, a far-off confidential murmur, with intervals of meaning silence — rather as if their thoughts had spoken for themselves, and they had stopped wonderingly to listen. They talked at first vaguely to this discreet audience of space and darkness, and then, growing bolder, spoke to each other and of themselves. Invested by the infinite gravity of nature, they had no fear of human ridicule to restrain their youthful conceit or the extravagance of their unimportant confessions. They talked of their tastes, of their habits, of their friends and acquaintances. They settled some points of doctrine, duty, and etiquette, with the sweet seriousness of youth and its all-powerful convictions. The listening vines would have recognized no flirtation or lovemaking in their animated but important confidences; yet when Mrs. Bradley reappeared to warn the invalid that it was time to seek his couch, they both coughed slightly in the nervous consciousness of some unaccustomed quality in their voices, and a sense of interruption far beyond their own or the innocent intruder's ken.

"Well?" said Mrs. Bradley, in the sitting-room as Mainwaring's steps retreated down the passage to his room.

"Well," said Louise, with a slight yawn, leaning her pretty shoulders languidly against the door-post, as she shaded her moonlight-accustomed eyes from the vulgar brilliancy of Mrs. Bradley's bedroom candle. "Well — oh, he talked a great deal about 'his people,' as he called them, and I talked about us. He 's very nice. You know in some things he 's really like a boy."

"He looks much better."

"Yes; but he is far from strong yet."

Meantime, Mainwaring had no other confidant of his impressions than his own thoughts. Mingled with his exaltation, which was the more seductive that it had no well-defined foundation for existing, and implied no future responsibility, was a recurrence of his uneasiness at the impending visit of Richardson the next day. Strangely enough, it had increased under the stimulus of the evening. Just as he was really getting on with the family, he felt sure that this visitor would import some foreign element into their familiarity, as Minty had done. It was very possible they would not like him: now he remembered there was really something ostentatiously British and insular about this Richardson — something they would likely resent. Why could n't this fellow have come later — or even before? Before what? But here he fell asleep, and almost instantly slipped from this veranda in the Sierras, six thousand miles away, to an ancient terrace, overgrown with moss and tradition, that overlooked the sedate glory of an English park. Here he found himself, restricted painfully by his inconsistent nightclothes, endeavoring to impress his mother and sisters with the singular virtues and excellences of his American host and hostesses — virtues and excellences that he himself was beginning to feel conscious had become more or less apocryphal in that atmosphere. He heard his mother's voice saying severely, "When you learn, Francis, to respect the opinions and prejudices of your family enough to prevent your appearing before them in this uncivilized aboriginal costume, we will listen to what you have to say of the friends whose habits you seem to have adopted;" and he was frantically indignant that his efforts to convince them that his negligence was a personal oversight, and not a Californian custom, were utterly futile. But even then this vision was

brushed away by the bewildering sweep of Louise's pretty skirt across the dreamy picture, and her delicate features and softly fringed eyes remained the last to slip from his fading consciousness.

The moon rose higher and higher above the sleeping house and softly breathing cañon. There was nothing to mar the idyllic repose of the landscape; only the growing light of the last two hours had brought out in the far eastern horizon a dim white peak, that gleamed faintly among the stars, like a bridal couch spread between the hills ringed with fading nuptial torches. No one would have believed that behind that impenetrable shadow to the west, in the heart of the forest, the throbbing sawmill of James Bradley was even at that moment eating its destructive way through the conserved growth of Nature and centuries, and that the refined proprietor of house and greenwood, with the glow of his furnace fires on his red shirt, and his alert, intelligent eyes, was the genie of that devastation, and the toiling leader of the shadowy, toiling figures around him.

CHAPTER III

Amid the beauty of the most uncultivated and untrodden wilderness there are certain localities where the meaner and more common processes of Nature take upon themselves a degrading likeness to the slovenly, wasteful, and improvident processes of man. The unrecorded landslip disintegrating a whole hillside will not only lay bare the delicate framework of strata and deposit to the vulgar eye, but hurl into the valley a débris so monstrous and unlovely as to shame even the hideous ruins left by dynamite, hydraulic, or pick and shovel; an overflown and forgotten woodland torrent will leave in some remote hollow a disturbed and ungraceful chaos of inextricable logs, branches, rock, and soil that will rival the unsavory details of some wrecked or abandoned settlement. Of lesser magnitude and importance, there are certain natural dust heaps, sinks, and cesspools, where the elements have collected the cast-off, broken, and frayed disjecta of wood and field — the sweepings of the sylvan household. It was remarkable that Nature, so kindly considerate of mere human ruins, made no attempt to cover up or disguise these monuments of her own mortality: no grass grew over the unsightly landslides, no moss or ivy clothed the stripped and bleached skeletons of overthrown branch and tree; the dead leaves and withered husks rotted in their open grave uncrossed by vine and creeper. Even the animals, except the lower organizations, shunned those haunts of decay and ruin.

It was scarcely a hundred yards from one of those dreary receptacles that Mr. Bradley had taken leave of Miss Minty

Sharpe. The cabin occupied by her father, herself, and a younger brother stood, in fact, on the very edge of the little hollow, which was partly filled with decayed wood, leaves, and displacements of the crumbling bank, with the coal dust and ashes which Mr. Sharpe had added from his forge, that stood a few paces distant at the corner of a cross-road. The occupants of the cabin had also contributed to the hollow the refuse of their household in broken boxes, earthenware, tin cans, and cast-off clothing; and it is not improbable that the site of the cabin was chosen with reference to this convenient disposal of useless and encumbering impedimenta. It was true that the locality offered little choice in the way of beauty. An outcrop of brown granite — a portent of higher altitudes — extended a quarter of a mile from the nearest fringe of dwarf laurel and "brush" in one direction; in the other an advanced file of Bradley's woods had suffered from some long-forgotten fire, and still raised its blackened masts and broken stumps over the scorched and arid soil, swept of older underbrush and verdure. On the other side of the road a dark ravine, tangled with briers and haunted at night by owls and wildcats, struggled wearily on, until, blundering at last upon the edge of the Great Cañon, it slipped and lost itself forever in a single furrow of those mighty flanks. When Bradley had once asked Sharpe why he had not built his house in the ravine, the blacksmith had replied, "That until the Lord had appointed his time, he reckoned to keep his head above ground and the foundations thereof." Howbeit, the ravine, or the "run," as it was locally known, was Minty's only Saturday afternoon resort for recreation or berries. "It was," she had explained, "pow'ful soothin', and solitary."

She entered the house, — a rude, square building of unpainted boards, — containing a sitting-room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. A glance at these rooms, which were

plainly furnished, and whose canvas-colored walls were adorned with gorgeous agricultural implement circulars, patent medicine calendars, with polytinted chromos and cheaply illuminated Scriptural texts, showed her that a certain neatness and order had been preserved during her absence; and finding the house empty, she crossed the barren and blackened intervening space between the back door and her father's forge, and entered the open shed. The light was fading from the sky; but the glow of the forge lit up the dusty road before it, and accented the blackness of the rocky ledge beyond. A small curly-headed boy, bearing a singular likeness to a smudged and blackened crayon drawing of Minty, was mechanically blowing the bellows and obviously intent upon something else; while her father — a powerfully built man, with a quaintly dissatisfied expression of countenance — was with equal want of interest mechanically hammering at a horseshoe. Without noticing Minty's advent, he lazily broke into a querulous drawling chant of some vague religious character: —

"O tur-ren, sinner; tur-ren.
For the Lord bids you turn — ah!
O tur-ren, sinner; tur-ren.
Why will you die?"

The musical accent adapted itself to the monotonous fall of the sledge-hammer; and at every repetition of the word "turn" he suited the action to the word by turning the horseshoe with the iron in his left hand.

A slight grunt at the end of every stroke and the simultaneous repetition of "turn" seemed to offer him amusement and relief. Minty, without speaking, crossed the shop, and administered a sound box on her brother's ear. "Take that, and let me ketch you agen layin' low when my back 's turned, to put on your store pants."

"The others had fetched away in the laig," said the boy, opposing a knee and elbow at acute angle to further attack.

"You jest get and change 'em," said Minty.

The sudden collapse of the bellows broke in upon the soothing refrain of Mr. Sharpe, and caused him to turn also.

"It 's Minty," he said, replacing the horseshoe on the coals, and setting his powerful arms and the sledge on the anvil with an exaggerated expression of weariness.

"Yes; it 's me," said Minty, "and Creation knows it 's time I *did* come, to keep that boy from ruinin' us with his airs and conceits."

"Did ye bring over any o' that fever mixter?"

"No. Bradley sez you 're loading yerself up with so much o' that bitter bark — kuinine they call it over there — that you 'll lift the ruff off your head next. He allows ye ain't got no ague; it 's jest wind and dyspepsy. He sez yer 's strong ez a hoss."

"Bradley," said Sharpe, laying aside his sledge with an aggrieved manner, which was, however, as complacent as his fatigue and discontent, "ez one of them nat'ral born finikin skunks ez I despise. I reckon he began to give p'ints to his parents when he was about knee-high to Richelieu there. He 's on them confidential terms with hisself and the Almighty that he reckons he ken run a sawmill and a man's insides at the same time with one hand tied behind him. And his finikin is up to his conceit: he wanted to tell me that that yer handy brush dump outside our shanty was unhealthy. Give a man with frills like that his own way, and he 'd be a-sprinkling odor cologne and peppermint all over the country."

"He set your shoulder as well as any doctor," said Minty.

"That 's bone-settin', and a nat'ral gift," returned Sharpe, as triumphantly as his habitual depression would admit; "it ain't conceit and finikin got out o' books! Well," he added, after a pause, "wot 's happened?"

Minty's face slightly changed. "Nothin'; I kem back to get some things," she said shortly, moving away.

"And ye saw *him?*"

"Ye-e-s," drawled Minty carelessly, still retreating.

"Bixby was along here about noon. He says the stranger was suthin' high and mighty in his own country, and them 'Frisco millionaires are quite sweet on him. Where are ye goin'?"

"In the house."

"Well, look yer, Minty. Now that you're here, ye might get up a batch o' hot biscuit for supper. Dinner was that promiscous and experimental to-day, along o' Richelieu's nat'ral foolin', that I think I could git outside of a little suthin' now, if only to prop up a kind of innard sinkin' that takes me. Ye ken tell me the news at supper."

Later, however, when Mr. Sharpe had quitted his forge for the night, and, seated at his domestic board, was, with a dismal presentiment of future indigestion, voraciously absorbing his favorite meal of hot saleratus biscuits swimming in butter, he had apparently forgotten his curiosity concerning Mainwaring, and settled himself to a complaining chronicle of the day's mishaps. "Nat'rally, havin' an extra lot o' work on hand and no time for foolin', what does that ornery Richelieu get up and do this mornin'? Ye know them ridiklus specimens that he's been chippin' outer that ledge that the yearth slipped from down the run, and litterin' up the whole shanty with 'em. Well, darn my skin! if he didn't run a heap of 'em, mixed up with coal, unbeknownd to me, in the forge, to make what he called a 'fire essay' of 'em. Nat'rally, I couldn't get a blessed iron hot, and didn't know what had gone of the fire, or the coal either, for two hours, till I stopped work and raked out the coal. That comes from his hangin' round that sawmill in the woods, and listenin' to Bradley's highfalutin' talk about rocks and strata and sich."

"But Bradley don't go a cent on minin', pop," said

Minty. "He sez the woods is good enough for him; and there 's millions to be made when the railroad comes along, and timber 's wanted."

"But until then he 's got to keep hisself, to pay wages, and keep the mill runnin'. Onless it 's, ez Bixby says, that he hopes to get that Englishman to rope in some o' them 'Frisco friends of his to take a hand. Ye did n't have any o' that kind o' talk, did ye?"

"No; not *that* kind o' talk," said Minty.

"Not *that* kind o' talk!" repeated her father, with aggrieved curiosity. "Wot kind, then?"

"Well," said Minty, lifting her black eyes to her father's; "I ain't no account, and you ain't no account either. You ain't got no college education, ain't got no friends in 'Frisco, and ain't got no high-toned style; I can't play the pianner, jabber French, nor get French dresses. We ain't got no fancy 'Shallet,' as they call it, with a first-class view of nothing; but only a shanty on dry rock. But afore *I'd* take advantage of a lazy, gawky boy — for it ain't anything else, though he 's good meanin' enough — that happened to fall sick in *my* house, and coax and cosset him, and wrap him in white cotton, and mother him, and sister him, and Aunt Sukey him, and almost dry-nuss him gin'rally jist to get him sweet on me and on mine, and take the inside track of others — *I'd* be an Injin! And if you 'd allow it, pop, you 'd be wuss nor a nigger!"

"Sho!" said her father, kindling with that intense gratification with which the male receives any intimation of alien feminine weakness. "It ain't that, Minty, I wanter know!"

"It 's jist that, pop; and I ez good ez let 'em know I seed it. I ain't a fool, if some folks do drop their eyes and pertend to wipe the laugh out of their noses with a handkerchief when I let out to speak. I may n't be good enough kempany" —

"Look yer, Minty," interrupted the blacksmith sternly, half rising from his seat with every trace of his former weakness vanished from his hardset face; "do you mean to say that they put on airs to ye — to *my* darter?"

"No," said Minty quickly; "the men did n't; and don't you, a man, mix yourself up with women's meannesses. I ken manage 'em, pop, with one hand."

Mr. Sharpe looked at his daughter's flashing black eyes. Perhaps an uneasy recollection of the late Mrs. Sharpe's remarkable capacity in that respect checked his further rage.

"No. Wot I was sayin'," resumed Minty, "ez that I may n't be thought by others good enough to keep kempany with baronets ez is to be — though baronets might n't object — but I ain't mean enough to try to steal away some ole woman's darling boy in England, or snatch some likely young English girl's big brother outer the family without sayin' by your leave. How 'd you like it if Richelieu was growed up, and went to sea, — and it would be like his peartness, — and he fell sick in some foreign land, and some princess or other skyugled *him* underhand away from us?"

Probably owing to the affair of the specimens, the elder Sharpe did not seem to regard the possible *mésalliance* of Richelieu with extraordinary disfavor. "That boy is conceited enough with hair ile and fine clothes for anything," he said plaintively. "But did n't that Louise Macy hev a feller already — that Captain Greyson? Wot 's gone o' him?"

"That 's it," said Minty: "he kin go out in the woods and whistle now. But all the same, she could hitch him in again at any time if the other stranger kicked over the traces. That 's the style over there at The Lookout. There ain't ez much heart in them two women put together ez would make a green gal flush up playin' forfeits. It 's

all in their breed, pop. Love ain't going to spile their appetites and complexions, give 'em nosebleed, nor put a drop o' water into their eyes in all their natural born days. That 's wot makes me mad. Ef I thought that Loo cared a bit for that child I would n't mind; I 'd just advise her to make him get up and get — pack his duds out o' camp, and go home and not come back until he had a written permit from his mother, or the other baronet in office."

"Looks sorter ef some one orter interfere," said the blacksmith reflectively. "'T ain't exakly a case for a vigilance committee, though it 's agin public morals, this sorter kidnappin' o' strangers. Looks ez if it might bring the country into discredit in England."

"Well, don't *you* go and interfere and havin' folks say ez my nose was put out o' jint over there," said Minty curtly. "There 's another Englishman comin' up from 'Frisco to see him to-morrow. Ef he ain't scooped up by Jenny Bradley he 'll guess there 's a nigger in the fence somewhere. But there, pop, let it drop. It 's a bad aig, anyway," she concluded, rising from the table, and passing her hands down her frock and her shapely hips, as if to wipe off further contamination of the subject. "Where 's Richelieu agin?"

"Said he did n't want supper, and like ez not he 's gone over to see that fammerly at the Summit. There 's a little girl thar he 's sparkin', about his own age."

"His own age!" said Minty indignantly. "Why, she 's double that, if she 's a day. Well — if he ain't the triflinest, conceitednest little limb that ever grew! I 'd like to know where he got it from — it was n't mar's style."

Mr. Sharpe smiled darkly. Richelieu's precocious gallantry evidently was not considered as gratuitous as his experimental metallurgy. But as his eyes followed his daughter's wholesome, Phyllis-like figure, a new idea took possession of him: needless to say, however, it was in the

line of another personal aggrievement, albeit it took the form of religious reflection.

"It 's curous, Minty, wot 's foreordained, and wot ain't. Now, yer 's one of them high and mighty fellows, after the Lord, ez comes meanderin' around here, and drops off — ez fur ez I kin hear — in a kind o' faint at the first house he kems to, and is taken in and lodged and sumptuously fed ; and, nat'rally, they gets their reward for it. Now wot 's to hev kept that young feller from coming *here* and droppin' down in my forge, or in this very room, and *you* a-tendin' him, and jist layin' over them folks at The Lookout?"

"Wot 's got hold o' ye, pop? Don't I tell ye he had a letter to Jim Bradley?" said Minty quickly, with an angry flash of color in her cheek.

"That ain't it," said Sharpe confidently; "it 's cos he *walked.* Nat'rally, you 'd think he 'd *ride,* being high and mighty; and that 's where, ez the parson will tell ye, wot 's merely fi-nite and human wisdom errs! Ef that feller had ridden, he 'd have had to come by this yer road, and by this yer forge, and stop a spell like any other. But it was foreordained that he should walk, jest cos it was n't generally kalkilated and reckoned on. So, *you* had no show."

For a moment Minty seemed struck with her father's original theory. But with a vigorous shake of her shoulders she threw it off. Her eyes darkened.

"I reckon you ain't thinking, pop" — she began.

"I was only sayin' it was curous," he rejoined quietly. Nevertheless, after a pause, he rose, coughed, and going up to the young girl, as she leaned over the dresser, bent his powerful arm around her, and drawing her and the plate she was holding against his breast, laid his bearded cheek for an instant softly upon her rebellious head. "It 's all right, Minty," he said; "ain't it, pet?" Minty's eyelids closed

gently under the familiar pressure. "Wot 's that in your hair, Minty?" he said tactfully, breaking an embarrassing pause.

"Bar's grease, father," murmured Minty in a child's voice — the grown-up woman, under that magic touch, having lapsed again into her father's motherless charge of ten years before.

"It 's pow'ful soothin', and pretty," said her father.

"I made it myself — do you want some?" asked Minty.

"Not now, girl!" For a moment they slightly rocked each other in that attitude — the man dextrously, the woman with infinite tenderness — and then they separated.

Late that night, after Richelieu had returned, and her father wrestled in his fitful sleep with the remorse of his guilty indulgence at supper, Minty remained alone in her room, hard at work, surrounded by the contents of one of her mother's trunks and the fragments of certain ripped-up and newly turned dresses. For Minty had conceived the bold idea of altering one of her mother's gowns to the fashion of a certain fascinating frock worn by Louise Macy. It was late when her self-imposed task was completed. With a nervous trepidation that was novel to her, Minty began to disrobe herself preparatory to trying on her new creation. The light of a tallow candle and a large swinging lantern, borrowed from her father's forge, fell shyly on her milky neck and shoulders, and shone in her sparkling eyes, as she stood before her largest mirror — the long glazed door of a kitchen clock which she had placed upon her chest of drawers. Had poor Minty been content with the full, free, and goddess-like outlines that it reflected, she would have been spared her impending disappointment. For, alas! the dress of her model had been framed upon a symmetrically attenuated French corset, and the unfortunate Minty's fuller and ampler curves had under her simple country stays known no more restraining cincture than

knew the Venus of Milo. The alteration was a hideous failure; it was neither Minty's statuesque outline nor Louise Macy's graceful contour. Minty was no fool, and the revelation of this slow education of the figure and training of outline — whether fair or false in art — struck her quick intelligence with all its full and hopeless significance. A bitter light sprang to her eyes; she tore the wretched sham from her shoulders, and then, wrapping a shawl around her, threw herself heavily and sullenly on the bed. But inaction was not a characteristic of Minty's emotion; she presently rose again, and taking an old work-box from her trunk, began to rummage in its recesses. It was an old shell-incrusted affair, and the apparent receptacle of such cheap odds and ends of jewelry as she possessed; a hideous cameo ring, the property of the late Mrs. Sharpe, was missing. She again rapidly explored the contents of the box, and then an inspiration seized her, and she darted into her brother's bedroom.

That precocious and gallant Lovelace of ten, despite all sentiment, had basely succumbed to the gross materialism of youthful slumber. On a cot in the corner, half hidden under the wreck of his own careless and hurried disrobing, with one arm hanging out of the coverlid, Richelieu lay supremely unconscious. On the forefinger of his small but dirty hand the missing cameo was still glittering guiltily. With a swift movement of indignation Minty rushed with uplifted palm towards the tempting expanse of youthful cheek that lay invitingly exposed upon the pillow. Then she stopped suddenly.

She had seen him lying thus a hundred times before. On the pillow near him an indistinguishable mass of golden fur — the helpless bulk of a squirrel chained to the leg of his cot; at his feet a wall-eyed cat, who had followed his tyrannous caprices with the long-suffering devotion of her sex; on the shelf above him a loathsome collection of flies

and tarantulas in dull green bottles, a slab of gingerbread for light nocturnal refection, and her own pot of bear's grease. Perhaps it was the piteous defenselessness of youthful sleep, perhaps it was some lingering memory of her father's caress; but as she gazed at him with troubled eyes, the juvenile reprobate slipped back into the baby boy that she had carried in her own childish arms such a short time ago, when the maternal responsibility had descended with the dead mother's ill-fitting dresses upon her lank girlish figure and scant virgin breast — and her hand fell listlessly at her side.

The sleeper stirred slightly and awoke. At the same moment, by some mysterious sympathy, a pair of beady bright eyes appeared in the bulk of fur near his curls, the cat stretched herself, and even a vague agitation was heard in the bottles on the shelf. Richelieu's blinking eyes wandered from the candle to his sister, and then the guilty hand was suddenly withdrawn under the bedclothes.

"No matter, dear," said Minty; "it 's mar's, and you kin wear it when you like, if you 'll only ask for it."

Richelieu wondered if he was dreaming! This unexpected mildness — this inexplicable tremor in his sister's voice: it must be some occult influence of the night season on the sisterly mind, possible akin to a fear of ghosts! He made a mental note of it in view of future favors, yet for the moment he felt embarrassedly gratified. "Ye ain't wantin' anything, Minty," he said affectionately; "a pail o' cold water from the far spring — no nothin'?" He made an ostentatious movement as if to rise, yet sufficiently protracted to prevent any hasty acceptance of his prodigal offer.

"No, dear," she said, still gazing at him with an absorbed look in her dark eyes.

Richelieu felt a slight creepy sensation under that lonely far-off gaze. "Your eyes look awful big at night, Minty,"

he said. He would have added "and pretty," but she was his sister, and he had the lofty fraternal conviction of his duty in repressing the inordinate vanity of the sex. "Ye 're sure ye ain't wantin' nothin'?"

"Not now, dear." She paused a moment, and then said deliberately, "But you would n't mind turnin' out after sun-up and runnin' an errand for me over to The Lookout?"

Richelieu's eyes sparkled so suddenly that even in her absorption Minty noticed the change. "But ye 're not goin' to tarry over there, ner gossip — you hear? Yer to take this yer message. Yer to say 'that it will be onpossible for me to come back there, on account — on account of'" —

"Important business," suggested Richelieu; "that 's the perlite style."

"Ef you like." She leaned over the bed and put her lips to his forehead, still damp with the dews of sleep, and then to his long-lashed lids. "Mind Nip!" — the squirrel — he practically suggested. For an instant their blonde curls mingled on the pillow. "Now go to sleep," she said curtly.

But Richelieu had taken her white neck in the short strangulatory hug of the small boy, and held her fast. "Ye 'll let me put on my best pants?"

"Yes."

"And wear that ring?"

"Yes" — a little sadly.

"Then yer kin count me in, Minty; and see here" — his voice sank to a confidential whisper — "mebbe some day ye 'll be beholden to *me* for a lot o' real jewelry."

She returned slowly to her room, and opening the window, looked out upon the night. The same moon that had lent such supererogatory grace to the natural beauty of The Lookout, here seemed to have failed, as Minty had, in disguising the relentless limitations of Nature or the cruel

bonds of custom. The black plain of granite, under its rays, appeared only to extend its poverty to some remoter barrier; the blackened stumps of the burnt forest stood bleaker against the sky, like broken and twisted pillars of iron. The cavity of the broken ledge where Richelieu had prospected was a hideous chasm of bluish blackness, over which a purple vapor seemed to hover; the "brush dump" beside the house showed a cavern of writhing and distorted objects stiffened into dark rigidity. She had often looked upon the prospect: it had never seemed so hard and changeless; yet she accepted it, as she had accepted it before.

She turned away, undressed herself mechanically, and went to bed. She had an idea that she had been very foolish; that her escape from being still more foolish was something miraculous, and in some measure connected with Providence, her father, her little brother, and her dead mother, whose dress she had recklessly spoiled. But that she had even so slightly touched the bitterness and glory of renunciation — as written of heroines and fine ladies by novelists and poets — never entered the foolish head of Minty Sharpe, the blacksmith's daughter.

CHAPTER IV

It was a little after daybreak next morning that Mainwaring awoke from the first unrefreshing night he had passed at The Lookout. He was so feverish and restless that he dressed himself at sunrise, and cautiously stepped out upon the still silent veranda. The chairs which he and Louise Macy had occupied were still, it seemed to him, conspicuously confidential with each other, and he separated them; but as he looked down into the Great Cañon at his feet, he was conscious of some undefinable change in the prospect. A slight mist was rising from the valley, as if it were the last of last night's illusions; the first level sunbeams were obtrusively searching, and the keen morning air had a dryly practical insistence which irritated him, until a light footstep on the farther end of the veranda caused him to turn sharply.

It was the singular apparition of a small boy, bearing a surprising resemblance to Minty Sharpe, and dressed in an unique fashion. On a tumbled sea of blonde curls a "chip" sailor hat, with a broad red ribbon, rode jauntily. But here the nautical suggestion changed, as had the desire of becoming a pirate which induced it. A red shirt, with a white collar, and a yellow plaid ribbon tie, that also recalled Minty Sharpe, lightly turned the suggestion of his costume to mining. Short black velvet trousers, coming to his knee, and ostentatiously new short-legged boots, with visible straps like curling ears, completed the entirely original character of his lower limbs.

Mainwaring, always easily gentle and familiar with

children and his inferiors, looked at him with an encouraging smile. Richelieu — for it was he — advanced gravely and held out his hand, with the cameo ring apparent. Mainwaring, with equal gravity, shook it warmly, and removed his hat. Richelieu, keenly observant, did the same.

"Is Jim Bradley out yet?" asked Richelieu carelessly.

"No; I think not. But I 'm Frank Mainwaring. Will I do?"

Richelieu smiled. The dimples, the white teeth, the dark, laughing eyes, were surely Minty's?

"I 'm Richelieu," he rejoined, with equal candor.

"Richelieu?"

"Yes. That Frenchman — the Lord Cardinal — you know. Mar saw Forrest do him out in St. Louis."

"Do him?"

"Yes, in the theayter."

With a confused misconception of his meaning, Mainwaring tried to recall the historical dress of the great Cardinal and fit it to the masquerader — if such he were — before him. But Richelieu relieved him by adding: —

"Richelieu Sharpe."

"Oh, that 's your *name!*" said Mainwaring cheerfully. "Then you 're Miss Minty's brother. I know her. How jolly lucky!"

They both shook hands again. Richelieu, eager to get rid of the burden of his sister's message, which he felt was in the way of free-and-easy intercourse with this charming stranger, looked uneasily towards the house.

"I say," said Mainwaring, "if you 're in a hurry, you 'd better go in there and knock. I hear some one stirring in the kitchen."

Richelieu nodded, but first went back to the steps of the veranda, picked up a small blue knotted handkerchief, apparently containing some heavy objects, and repassed Mainwaring.

"What! have you cut it, Richelieu, with your valuables? What have you got there?"

"Specimins," said Richelieu shortly, and vanished.

He returned presently. "Well, Cardinal, did you see anybody?" asked Mainwaring.

"Mrs. Bradley; but Jim 's over to the mill. I 'm goin' there."

"Did you see Miss Macy?" continued Mainwaring carelessly.

"Loo?"

"Loo! — well; yes."

"No. She 's philanderin' with Captain Greyson."

"Philandering with Greyson?" echoed Mainwaring in wonder.

"Yes; on horseback on the ridge."

"You mean she 's riding out with Mr. — with Captain Greyson?"

"Yes; ridin' *and* philanderin'," persisted Richelieu.

"And what do you call philandering?"

"Well; I reckon you and she oughter know," returned Richelieu, with a precocious air.

"Certainly," said Mainwaring, with a faint smile. Richelieu really was like Minty.

There was a long silence. This young Englishman was becoming exceedingly uninteresting. Richelieu felt that he was gaining neither profit nor amusement, and losing time. "I 'm going," he said.

"Good-morning," said Mainwaring, without looking up.

Richelieu picked up his specimens, thoroughly convinced of the stranger's glittering deceitfulness, and vanished.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Mrs. Bradley came from the house. She apologized, with a slightly distrait smile, for the tardiness of the household. "Mr. Bradley stayed at the mill all night, and will not be here until

breakfast, when he brings your friend Mr. Richardson with him" — Mainwaring scarcely repressed a movement of impatience — "who arrives early. It 's unfortunate that Miss Sharpe can't come to-day."

In his abstraction Mainwaring did not notice that Mrs. Bradley slightly accented Minty's formal appellation, and said carelessly: —

"Oh, that 's why her brother came over here so early!"

"Did *you* see him?" asked Mrs. Bradley, almost abruptly.

"Yes. He is an amusing little beggar; but I think he shares his sister's preference for Mr. Bradley. He deserted me here in the veranda for him at the mill."

"Louise will keep you company as soon as she has changed her dress," continued Mrs. Bradley. "She was out riding early this morning with a friend. She 's very fond of early morning rides."

"*And* philandering," repeated Mainwaring to himself. It was quite natural for Miss Macy to ride out in the morning, after the fashion of the country, with an escort; but why had the cub insisted on the "philandering"? He had said, "*and* philandering" distinctly. It was a nasty thing for him to say. Any other fellow but he, Mainwaring, might misunderstand the whole thing. Perhaps he ought to warn her — but no! he could not repeat the gossip of a child, and that child the brother of one of her inferiors. But was Minty an inferior? Did she and Minty talk together about this fellow Greyson? At all events, it would only revive the awkwardness of the preceding day, and he resolved to say nothing.

He was rewarded by a half-inquiring, half-confiding look in Louise's bright eyes, when she presently greeted him on the veranda. "She had quite forgotten," she said, "to tell him last night of her morning's engagement; indeed, she had half forgotten *it*. It used to be a favorite practice

of hers, with Captain Greyson; but she had lately given it up. She believed she had not ridden since — since" —

"Since when?" asked Mainwaring.

"Well, since you were ill," she said frankly.

A quick pleasure shone in Mainwaring's cheek and eye; but Louise's pretty lids did not drop, nor her faint, quiet bloom deepen. Breakfast was already waiting when Mr. Richardson arrived alone. He explained that Mr. Bradley had some important and unexpected business which had delayed him, but which, he added, "Mr. Bradley says may prove interesting enough to you to excuse his absence this morning." Mainwaring was not displeased that his critical and observant host was not present at their meeting. Louise Macy was, however, as demurely conscious of the different bearing of the two compatriots. Richardson's somewhat self-important patronage of the two ladies, and that Californian familiarity he had acquired, changed to a certain uneasy deference towards Mainwaring; while the younger Englishman's slightly stiff and deliberate cordiality was, nevertheless, mingled with a mysterious understanding that appeared innate and unconscious. Louise was quick to see that these two men, more widely divergent in quality than any two of her own countrymen, were yet more subtly connected by some unknown sympathy than the most equal of Americans. Minty's prophetic belief of the effect of the two women upon Richardson was certainly true as regarded Mrs. Bradley. The banker — a large material nature — was quickly fascinated by the demure, puritanic graces of that lady, and was inclined to exhibit a somewhat broad and ostentatious gallantry that annoyed Mainwaring. When they were seated alone on the veranda, which the ladies had discreetly left to them, Richardson said: —

"Odd I did n't hear of Bradley's wife before. She seems a spicy, pretty, comfortable creature. Regularly thrown away with him up here."

Mainwaring replied coldly that she was "an admirable helpmeet of a very admirable man," not, however, without an uneasy recollection of her previous confidences respecting her husband. "They have been most thoroughly good and kind to me; my own brother and sister could not have done more. And certainly not with better taste or delicacy," he added markedly.

"Certainly, certainly," said Richardson hurriedly. "I wrote to Lady Mainwaring that you were taken capital care of by some very honest people; and that" —

"Lady Mainwaring already knows what I think of them, and what she owes to their kindness," said Mainwaring dryly.

"True, true," said Richardson apologetically. "Of course you must have seen a good deal of them. I only know Bradley in a business way. He 's been trying to get the Bank to help him to put up some new mills here; but we did n't see it. I dare say he is good company — rather amusing, eh?"

Mainwaring had the gift of his class of snubbing by the polite and forgiving oblivion of silence. Richardson shifted uneasily in his chair, but continued with assumed carelessness: —

"No; I only knew of this cousin, Miss Macy. I heard of her when she was visiting some friends in Menlo Park last year. Rather an attractive girl. They say Colonel Johnson, of Sacramento, took quite a fancy to her — it would have been a good match, I dare say, for he is very rich — but the thing fell through in some way. Then, they say, *she* wanted to marry that Spaniard, young Pico, of the Amador Ranch; but his family would n't hear of it. Somehow, she 's deuced unlucky. I suppose she 'll make a mess of it with that Captain Greyson she was out riding with this morning."

"Did n't the Bank think Bradley's mills a good in-

vestment?" asked Mainwaring quietly, when Richardson paused.

"Not with him in it; he is not a business man, you know."

"I thought he was. He seems to me an energetic man, who knows his work, and is not afraid to look after it himself."

"That 's just it. He has got absurd ideas of coöperating with his workmen, you know, and doing everything slowly and on a limited scale. The only thing to be done is to buy up all the land on this ridge, run off the settlers, freeze out all the other mills, and put it into a big San Francisco company on shares. That 's the only way we would look at it."

"But you don't consider the investment bad, even from *his* point of view?"

"Perhaps not."

"And you only decline it because it is n't big enough for the Bank?"

"Exactly."

"Richardson," said Mainwaring, slowly rising, putting his hands in his trouser pockets, and suddenly looking down upon the banker from the easy level of habitual superiority, "I wish you 'd attend to this thing for me. I desire to make some return to Mr. Bradley for his kindness. I wish to give him what help he wants — in his own way — you understand. I wish it, and I believe my father wishes it, too. If you 'd like him to write to you to that effect" —

"By no means, it 's not at all necessary," said Richardson, dropping with equal suddenness into his Old World obsequiousness. "I shall certainly do as you wish. It is not a bad investment, Mr. Mainwaring, and, as you suggest, a very proper return for their kindness. And being here, it will come quite naturally for me to take up the affair again."

"And — I say, Richardson."

"Yes, sir?"

"As these ladies are rather short handed in their domestic service, you know, perhaps you'd better not stay to luncheon or dinner, but go on to the Summit House — it's only a mile or two farther — and come back here this evening. I sha'n't want you until then."

"Certainly!" stammered Richardson. "I'll just take leave of the ladies!"

"It's not at all necessary," said Mainwaring quietly; "you would only disturb them in their household duties. I'll tell them what I've done with you, if they ask. You'll find your stick and hat in the passage, and you can leave the veranda by these steps. By the way, you had better manage at the Summit to get some one to bring my traps from here to be forwarded to Sacramento to-morrow. I'll want a conveyance, or a horse of some kind, myself, for I've given up walking for a while; but we can settle about that to-night. Come early. Good-morning!"

He accompanied his thoroughly subjugated countryman — who, however, far from attempting to reassert himself, actually seemed easier and more cheerful in his submission — to the end of the veranda, and watched him depart. As he turned back, he saw the pretty figure of Louise Macy leaning against the doorway. How graceful and refined she looked in that simple morning dress! What wonder that she was admired by Greyson, by Johnson, and by that Spaniard! — no, by Jove, it was *she* that wanted to marry him!

"What have you sent away Mr. Richardson for?" asked the young girl, with a half-reproachful, half-mischievous look in her bright eyes.

"I packed him off because I thought it was a little too hard on you and Mrs. Bradley to entertain him without help."

"But as he was *our* guest, you might have left that to us," said Miss Macy.

"By Jove! I never thought of that," said Mainwaring, coloring in consternation. "Pray forgive me, Miss Macy — but you see I knew the man, and could say it, and you could n't."

"Well, I forgive you, for you look really so cut up," said Louise, laughing. "But I don't know what Jenny will say of your disposing of her conquest so summarily." She stopped and regarded him more attentively. "Has he brought you any bad news? if so, it 's a pity you did n't send him away before. He 's quite spoiling our cure."

Mainwaring thought bitterly that he had. "But it 's a cure for all that, Miss Macy," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "and being a cure, you see, there 's no longer an excuse for my staying here. I have been making arrangements for leaving here to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Do you think it soon, Miss Macy?" asked Mainwaring, turning pale in spite of himself.

"I quite forgot — that you were here as an invalid only, and that we owe our pleasure to the accident of your pain."

She spoke a little artificially, he thought, yet her cheeks had not lost their pink bloom, nor her eyes their tranquillity. Had he heard Minty's criticism he might have believed that the organic omission noticed by her was a fact.

"And now that your good work as Sister of Charity is completed, you 'll be able to enter the world of gayety again with a clear conscience," said Mainwaring, with a smile that he inwardly felt was a miserable failure. "You 'll be able to resume your morning rides, you know, which the wretched invalid interrupted."

Louise raised her clear eyes to his without reproach, indignation, or even wonder. He felt as if he had attempted an insult and failed.

"Does my cousin know you are going so soon?" she asked finally.

"No, I did not know myself until to-day. You see," he added hastily, while his honest blood blazoned the lie in his cheek, "I've heard of some miserable business affairs that will bring me back to England sooner than I expected."

"I think you should consider your health more important than any mere business," said Louise. "I don't mean that you should remain *here*," she added, with a hasty laugh, "but it would be a pity, now that you have reaped the benefit of rest and taking care of yourself, that you should not make it your only business to seek it elsewhere."

Mainwaring longed to say that within the last half hour, living or dying had become of little moment to him; but he doubted the truth or efficacy of this time-worn heroic of passion. He felt, too, that anything he said was a mere subterfuge for the real reason of his sudden departure. And how was he to question her as to that reason? In escaping from these subterfuges — he was compelled to lie again. With an assumption of changing the subject, he said calmly, "Richardson thought he had met you before — in Menlo Park, I think."

Amazed at the evident irrelevance of the remark, Louise said coldly that she did not remember having seen him before.

"I think it was at a Mr. Johnson's — or *with* a Mr. Johnson — or perhaps at one of those Spanish ranches — I think he mentioned some name like Pico!"

Louise looked at him wonderingly for an instant, and then gave way to a frank, irrepressible laugh, which lent her delicate but rather set little face all the color he had missed. Partially relieved by her unconcern, and yet mortified that he had only provoked her sense of the ludicrous, he tried to laugh also.

"Then, to be quite plain," said Louise, wiping her now humid eyes, "you want me to understand that you really did n't pay sufficient attention to hear correctly! Thank you; that 's a pretty English compliment, I suppose."

"I dare say you would n't call it 'philandering'?"

"I certainly should n't, for I don't know what 'philandering' means."

Mainwaring could not reply, with Richelieu, "You ought to know;" nor did he dare explain what he thought it meant, and how he knew it. Louise, however, innocently solved the difficulty.

"There 's a country song I 've heard Minty sing," she said. "It runs —

> 'Come, Philander, let us be a-marchin',
> Every one for his true love a-sarchin',
> Choose your true love now or never.' . . .

Have you been listening to her also?"

"No," said Mainwaring, with a sudden incomprehensible but utterly irrepressible resolution; "but *I 'm* 'a-marchin',' you know, and perhaps I must 'choose my true love now or never.' Will you help me, Miss Macy?"

He drew gently near her. He had become quite white, but also very manly, and, it struck her, more deeply, thoroughly, and conscientiously sincere than any man who had before addressed her. She moved slightly away, as if to rest herself by laying both hands upon the back of the chair.

"Where do you expect to begin your 'sarchin'"?" she said, leaning on the chair and tilting it before her; "or are you as vague as usual as to locality? Is it at some 'Mr. Johnson' or 'Mr. Pico,' or" —

"Here," he interrupted boldly.

"I really think you ought to first tell my cousin that you are going away to-morrow," she said, with a faint smile. "It 's such short notice. She 's just in there." She

nodded her pretty head, without raising her eyes, towards the hall.

"But it may not be so soon," said Mainwaring.

"Oh, then the 'sarchin'' is not so important?" said Louise, raising her head, and looking towards the hall with some uneasy but indefinable feminine instinct.

She was right; the sitting-room door opened, and Mrs. Bradley made her smiling appearance.

"Mr. Mainwaring was just looking for you," said Louise, for the first time raising her eyes to him. "He 's not only sent off Mr. Richardson, but he 's going away himself to-morrow."

Mrs. Bradley looked from the one to the other in mute wonder. Mainwaring cast an imploring glance at Louise, which had the desired effect. Much more seriously, and in a quaint, businesslike way, the young girl took it upon herself to explain to Mrs. Bradley that Richardson had brought the invalid some important news that would, unfortunately, not only shorten his stay in America, but even compel him to leave The Lookout sooner than he expected, perhaps to-morrow. Mainwaring thanked her with his eyes, and then turned to Mrs. Bradley.

"Whether I go to-morrow or next day," he said, with simple and earnest directness, "I intend, you know, to see you soon again, either here or in my own home in England. I do not know," he added, with marked gravity, "that I have succeeded in convincing you that I have made your family already well known to my people, and that" — he fixed his eyes with a meaning look on Louise — "no matter when, or in what way, you come to them, your place is made ready for you. You may not like them, you know: the governor is getting to be an old man — perhaps too old for young Americans — but *they* will like *you*, and you must put up with that. My mother and sisters know Miss Macy as well as I do, and will make her one of the family."

The conscientious earnestness with which these apparent conventionalities were uttered, and some occult quality of quiet conviction in the young man's manner, brought a pleasant sparkle to the eyes of Mrs. Bradley and Louise.

"But," said Mrs. Bradley gayly, "our going to England is quite beyond our present wildest dreams; nothing but a windfall, an unexpected rise in timber, or even the tabooed hotel speculation, could make it possible."

"But *I* shall take the liberty of trying to present it to Mr. Bradley to-night in some practical way that may convince even his critical judgment," said Mainwaring, still seriously. "It will be," he added more lightly, "the famous testimonial of my cure which I promised you."

"And you will find Mr. Bradley so skeptical that you will be obliged to defer your going," said Mrs. Bradley triumphantly. "Come, Louise, we must not forget that we have still Mr. Mainwaring's present comfort to look after, that Minty has basely deserted us, and that we ourselves must see that the last days of our guest beneath our roof are not remembered for their privation."

She led Louise away with a half-mischievous suggestion of maternal propriety, and left Mainwaring once more alone on the veranda.

He had done it! Certainly she must have understood his meaning, and there was nothing left for him to do but to acquaint Bradley with his intentions to-night, and press her for a final answer in the morning. There would be no indelicacy then in asking her for an interview more free from interruption than this public veranda. Without conceit, he did not doubt what the answer would be. His indecision, his sudden resolution to leave her, had been all based upon the uncertainty of *his* own feelings, the propriety of *his* declaration, the possibility of some previous experience of hers that might compromise *him*. Convinced by her unembarrassed manner of her innocence, or rather

satisfied of her indifference to Richardson's gossip, he had been hurried by his feelings into an unexpected avowal. Brought up in the perfect security of his own social position, and familiarly conscious — without vanity — of its importance and power in such a situation, he believed, without undervaluing Louise's charms or independence, that he had no one else than himself to consult. Even the slight uneasiness that still pursued him was more due to his habitual conscientiousness of his own intention than to any fear that she would not fully respond to it. Indeed, with his conservative ideas of proper feminine self-restraint, Louise's calm passivity and undemonstrative attitude were a proof of her superiority; had she blushed over-much, cried, or thrown herself into his arms, he would have doubted the wisdom of so easy a selection. It was true he had known her scarcely three weeks; if he chose to be content with that, his own accessible record of three centuries should be sufficient for her, and condone any irregularity.

Nevertheless, as an hour slipped away and Louise did not make her appearance — either on the veranda or in the little sitting-room off the hall, Mainwaring became more uneasy as to the incompleteness of their interview. Perhaps a faint suspicion of the inadequacy of her response began to trouble him; but he still fatuously regarded it rather as owing to his own hurried and unfinished declaration. It was true that he had n't said half what he intended to say; it was true that she might have misunderstood it as the conventional gallantry of the situation, as — terrible thought! — the light banter of the habitual lovemaking American, to which she had been accustomed; perhaps even now she relegated him to the level of Greyson, and this accounted for her singular impassiveness — an impassiveness that certainly was singular now he reflected upon it — that might have been even contempt. The last thought pricked his deep conscientiousness; he walked hurriedly

up and down the veranda, and then, suddenly reëntering his room, took up a sheet of note-paper, and began to write to her: —

Can you grant me a few moments' interview alone? I cannot bear you should think that what I was trying to tell you when we were interrupted was prompted by anything but the deepest sincerity and conviction, or that I am willing it should be passed over lightly by you or be forgotten. Pray give me a chance of proving it, by saying you will see me. F. M.

But how should he convey this to her? His delicacy revolted against handing it to her behind Mrs. Bradley's back, or the prestidigitation of slipping it into her lap or under her plate before them at luncheon; he thought for an instant of the Chinaman, but gentlemen — except in that "mirror of nature" the stage — usually hesitate to suborn other people's servants, or intrust a woman's secret to her inferiors. He remembered that Louise's room was at the farther end of the house, and its low window gave upon the veranda, and was guarded at night by a film of white and blue curtains that were parted during the day, to allow a triangular revelation of a pale blue and white draped interior. Mainwaring reflected that the low inside window ledge was easily accessible from the veranda, would afford a capital lodgment for the note, and be quickly seen by the fair occupant of the room on entering. He sauntered slowly past the window; the room was empty, the moment propitious. A slight breeze was stirring the blue ribbons of the curtain; it would be necessary to secure the note with something; he returned along the veranda to the steps, where he had noticed a small irregular stone lying, which had evidently escaped from Richelieu's bag of treasure specimens, and had been overlooked by that ingenuous child. It was of a pretty peacock-blue color,

and, besides securing a paper, would be sure to attract her attention. He placed his note on the inside ledge, and the blue stone atop, and went away with a sense of relief.

Another half hour passed without incident. He could hear the voices of the two women in the kitchen and dining-room. After a while they appeared to cease, and he heard the sound of an opening door. It then occurred to him that the veranda was still too exposed for a confidential interview, and he resolved to descend the steps, pass before the windows of the kitchen where Louise might see him, and penetrate the shrubbery, where she might be induced to follow him. They would not be interrupted nor overheard there.

But he had barely left the veranda before the figure of Richelieu, who had been patiently waiting for Mainwaring's disappearance, emerged stealthily from the shrubbery. He had discovered his loss on handing his "fire assays" to the good-humored Bradley for later examination, and he had retraced his way, step by step, looking everywhere for his missing stone with the unbounded hopefulness, lazy persistency, and lofty disregard for time and occupation known only to the genuine boy. He remembered to have placed his knotted bag upon the veranda, and slipping off his stiff boots slowly and softly, slid along against the wall of the house, looking carefully on the floor, and yet preserving a studied negligence of demeanor, with one hand in his pocket, and his small mouth contracted into a singularly soothing and almost voiceless whistle — Richelieu's own peculiar accomplishment. But no stone appeared. Like most of his genus he was superstitious, and repeated to himself the cabalistic formula: "Losin's seekin's, findin's keepin's" — presumed to be of great efficacy in such cases — with religious fervor. He had laboriously reached the end of the veranda when he noticed the open window of Louise's room, and stopped as a perfunctory duty to look

in. And then Richelieu Sharpe stood for an instant utterly confounded and aghast at this crowning proof of the absolute infamy and sickening enormity of Man.

There was *his* stone — *his*, *Richelieu's*, *own specimen*, carefully gathered by himself and none other — and now stolen, abstracted, "skyugled," "smouged," "hooked" by this "rotten, skunkified, long-legged, splay-footed, hoss-laughin', nigger-toothed, or'nary despot!" And, worse than all, actually made to do infamous duty as a love-token! — a "candy-gift!" — a "philanderin' box!" to *his*, Richelieu's, girl — for Louise belonged to that innocent and vague outside seraglio of Richelieu's boyish dreams — and put atop of a letter to her! and Providence permitted such an outrage! "Wot was he, Richelieu, sent to school for, and organized wickedness in the shape of gorilla Injins like this allowed to ride high horses rampant over Californey!" He looked at the heavens in mute appeal. And then — Providence not immediately interfering — he thrust his own small arm into the window, regained his priceless treasure, and fled swiftly.

A fateful silence ensued. The wind slightly moved the curtain outward, as if in a playful attempt to follow him, and then subsided. A moment later, apparently reinforced by other winds, or sympathizing with Richelieu, it lightly lifted the unlucky missive and cast it softly from the window. But here another wind, lying in wait, caught it cleverly, and tossed it, in a long curve, into the abyss. For an instant it seemed to float lazily, as on the mirrored surface of a lake, until, turning upon its side, it suddenly darted into utter oblivion.

When Mainwaring returned from the shrubbery, he went softly to the window. The disappearance of the letter and stone satisfied him of the success of his stratagem, and for the space of three hours relieved his anxiety. But at the end of that time, finding no response from

Louise, his former uneasiness returned. Was she offended, or — the first doubt of her acceptance of him crossed his mind! A sudden and inexplicable sense of shame came upon him. At the same moment, he heard his name called from the steps, turned — and beheld Minty.

Her dark eyes were shining with a pleasant light, and her lips parted on her white teeth with a frank, happy smile. She advanced and held out her hand. He took it with a mingling of disappointment and embarrassment.

"You 're wondering why I kem on here, arter I sent word this morning that I kelkilated not to come. Well, 'twixt then and now suthin' 's happened. We 've had fine doin's over at our house, you bet! Pop don't know which end he 's standin' on; and I reckon that for about ten minutes I did n't know my own name. But ez soon ez I got fairly hold o' the hull thing, and had it put straight in my mind, I sez to myself, Minty Sharpe, sez I, the first thing for you to do now, is to put on yer bonnet and shawl, and traipse over to Jim Bradley's and help them two womenfolks get dinner for themselves and that sick stranger. And," continued Minty, throwing herself into a chair and fanning her glowing face with her apron, "yer I am!"

"But you have not told me *what* has happened," said Mainwaring, with a constrained smile and an uneasy glance towards the house.

"That 's so," said Minty, with a brilliant laugh. "I clean forgot the hull gist of the thing. Well, we 're rich folks now — over thar on Barren Ledge! That onery brother of mine, Richelieu, hez taken some of his specimens over to Jim Bradley to be tested. And Bradley, just to please that child, takes 'em; and not an hour ago Bradley comes running, likety switch, over to pop to tell him to put up his notices, for the hull of that ledge where the forge stands is a mine o' silver and copper. Afore ye knew it, Lordy! half the folks outer the Summit and the

mill was scattered down thar all over it. Richardson — that stranger ez knows you — kem thar too with Jim, and he allows, ef Bradley's essay is right, it 's worth more than a hundred thousand dollars ez it stands!"

"I suppose I must congratulate you, Miss Sharpe," said Mainwaring, with an attempt at interest, but his attention still preoccupied with the open doorway.

"Oh, *they* know all about it!" said Minty, following the direction of his abstracted eyes with a slight darkening of her own. "I jest kem out o' the kitchen the other way, and Jim sent 'em a note; but I allowed I 'd tell *you* myself. Specially ez you was going away to-morrow."

"Who said I was going away to-morrow?" asked Mainwaring uneasily.

"Loo Macy!"

"Ah — she did? But I may change my mind, you know!" he continued, with a faint smile.

Minty shook her curls decisively. "I reckon *she* knows," she said dryly; "she 's got law and gospel for wot she says. But yer she comes. Ask her! Look yer, Loo," she added, as the two women appeared at the doorway, with a certain exaggeration of congratulatory manner that struck Mainwaring as being as artificial and disturbed as his own, "did n't Sir Francis yer say he was going to-morrow?"

"That 's what I understood!" returned Louise, with cold astonishment, letting her clear indifferent eyes fall upon Mainwaring. "I do not know that he has changed his mind."

"Unless, as Miss Sharpe is a great capitalist now, she is willing to use her powers of persuasion," added Mrs. Bradley, with a slight acidulous pointing of her usual prim playfulness.

"I reckon Minty Sharpe 's the same ez she allus wos, unless more so," returned Minty, with an honest egotism

that carried so much conviction to the hearer as to condone its vanity. "But I kem yer to do a day's work, gals, and I allow to pitch in and do it, and not sit yer swoppin' compliments and keeping *him* from packin' his duds. Onless," she stopped, and looked around at the uneasy, unsympathetic circle with a faint tremulousness of lip that belied the brave black eyes above it, "onless I 'm in yer way."

The two women sprang forward with a feminine bewildering excess of protestation; and Mainwaring, suddenly pierced through his outer selfish embarrassment to his more honest depths, stammered quickly: —

"Look here, Miss Sharpe, if you think of running away again, after having come all the way here to make us share the knowledge of your good fortune and your better heart, by Jove! I 'll go back with you."

But here the two women effusively hurried her away from the dangerous proximity of such sympathetic honesty, and a moment later Mainwaring heard her laughing voice, as of old, ringing in the kitchen. And then, as if unconsciously responding to the significant common sense that lay in her last allusion to him, he went to his room and grimly began his packing.

He did not again see Louise alone. At their informal luncheon the conversation turned upon the more absorbing topic of the Sharpes' discovery, its extent, and its probable effect upon the fortunes of the locality. He noticed, abstractedly, that both Mrs. Bradley and her cousin showed a real or assumed skepticism of its value. This did not disturb him greatly, except for its intended check upon Minty's enthusiasm. He was more conscious, perhaps, — with a faint touch of mortified vanity, — that his own contemplated departure was of lesser importance than this local excitement. Yet in his growing conviction that all was over — if, indeed, it had ever begun — between himself and Louise, he was grateful to this natural diversion of

incident which spared them both an interval of embarrassing commonplaces. And with the suspicion of some indefinable insincerity — either of his own or Louise's — haunting him, Minty's frank heartiness and outspoken loyalty gave him a strange relief. It seemed to him as if the clear, cool breath of the forest had entered with her homely garments, and the steadfast truths of Nature were incarnate in her shining eyes. How far this poetic fancy would have been consistent or even coexistent with any gleam of tenderness or self-forgetfulness in Louise's equally pretty orbs, I leave the satirical feminine reader to determine.

It was late when Bradley at last returned, bringing further and more complete corroboration of the truth of Sharpe's good fortune. Two experts had arrived, one from Pine Flat and another from the Summit, and upon this statement Richardson had offered to purchase an interest in the discovery that would at once enable the blacksmith to develop his mine. "I should n't wonder, Mainwaring," he added cheerfully, "if he 'd put you into it, too, and make your eternal fortune."

"With larks falling from the skies all round you, it 's a pity *you* could n't get put into something," said Mrs. Bradley, straightening her pretty brows.

"I 'm not a gold-miner, my dear," said Bradley pleasantly.

"Nor a gold-finder," returned his wife, with a cruel little depression of her pink nostrils, "but you can work all night in that stupid mill and then," she added in a low voice, to escape Minty's attention, "spend the whole of the next day examining and following up a boy's discovery that his own relations had been too lazy and too ignorant to understand and profit by. I suppose that next you will be hunting up a site on the *other side* of the Cañon, where somebody else can put up a hotel and ruin your own prospects."

A sensitive shadow of pain quickly dimmed Bradley's glance — not the first or last time, evidently, for it was gradually bringing out a background of sadness in his intelligent eyes. But the next moment he turned kindly to Mainwaring, and began to deplore the necessity of his early departure, which Richardson had already made known to him with practical and satisfying reasons.

"I hope you won't forget, my dear fellow, that your most really urgent business is to look after your health; and if, hereafter, you 'll only remember the old Lookout enough to impress that fact upon you, I shall feel that any poor service I have rendered you has been amply repaid."

Mainwaring, notwithstanding that he winced slightly at this fateful echo of Louise's advice, returned the grasp of his friend's hand with an honest pressure equal to his own. He longed now only for the coming of Richardson, to complete his scheme of grateful benefaction to his host.

The banker came fortunately as the conversation began to flag; and Mrs. Bradley's half-coquettish ill humor of a pretty woman and Louise's abstracted indifference were becoming so noticeable as to even impress Minty into a thoughtful taciturnity. The graciousness of his reception by Mrs. Bradley somewhat restored his former ostentatious gallantry; and his self-satisfied, domineering manner had enough masculine power in it to favorably affect the three women, who, it must be confessed, were a little bored by the finer abstractions of Bradley and Mainwaring. After a few moments, Mainwaring rose and, with a significant glance at Richardson to remind him of his proposed conference with Bradley, turned to leave the room. He was obliged to pass Louise, who was sitting by the table. His attention was suddenly arrested by something in her hand with which she was listlessly playing. It was the stone which he had put on his letter to her.

As he had not been present when Bradley arrived, he

did not know that this fateful object had been brought home by his host, who, after receiving it from Richelieu, had put it in his pocket to illustrate his story of the discovery. On the contrary, it seemed that Louise's careless exposure of his foolish stratagem was gratuitously and purposely cruel. Nevertheless, he stopped and looked at her.

"That 's a queer stone you have there," he said in a tone which she recognized as coldly and ostentatiously civil.

"Yes," she replied, without looking up; "it 's the outcrop of that mine." She handed it to him as if to obviate any further remark. "I thought you had seen it before."

"The outcrop," he repeated dryly. "That is — it — it — it is the indication or sign of something important that 's below it — is n't it?"

Louise shrugged her shoulders skeptically. "It don't follow. It 's just as likely to cover rubbish, after you 've taken the trouble to look."

"Thanks," he said, with measured gentleness, and passed quietly out of the room.

The moon had already risen when Bradley, with his brierwood pipe, preceded Richardson upon the veranda. The latter threw his large frame into Louise's rocking-chair near the edge of the abyss; Bradley, with his own chair tilted against the side of the house after the national fashion, waited for him to speak. The absence of Mainwaring and the stimulus of Mrs. Bradley's graciousness had given the banker a certain condescending familiarity, which Bradley received with amused and ironical tolerance that his twinkling eyes made partly visible in the darkness.

"One of the things I wanted to talk to you about, Bradley, was that old affair of the advance you asked for from the Bank. We did not quite see our way to it then, and, speaking as a business man, it is n't really a matter of business now; but it has lately been put to me in a light that would make the doing of it possible — you

understand? The fact of the matter is this: Sir Robert Mainwaring, the father of the young fellow you 've got in your house, is one of our directors and largest shareholders, and I can tell you — if you don't suspect it already — you 've been lucky, Bradley — deucedly lucky — to have had him in your house and to have rendered him a service. He 's the heir to one of the largest landed estates in his county, one of the oldest county families, and will step into the title some day. But, ahem!" he coughed patronizingly, "you knew all that! No? Well, that charming wife of yours, at least, does; for she 's been talking about it. Gad, Bradley, it takes those women to find out anything of that kind, eh?"

The light in Bradley's eyes and his pipe went slowly out together.

"Then we 'll say that affair of the advance is as good as settled. It 's Sir Robert's wish, you understand, — and this young fellow's wish, — and if you 'll come down to the Bank next week we 'll arrange it for you; I think you 'll admit they 're doing the handsome to you and yours. And therefore," he lowered his voice confidentially, "you 'll see, Bradley, that it will only be the honorable thing in you, you know, to look upon the affair as finished, and, in fact, to do all you can"— he drew his chair closer — "to — to — to drop this other foolishness."

"I don't think I quite understand you!" said Bradley slowly.

"But your wife does, if you don't," returned Richardson bluntly; "I mean this foolish flirtation between Louise Macy and Mainwaring, which is utterly preposterous. Why, man, it can't possibly come to anything, and it could n't be allowed for a moment. Look at his position and hers. I should think, as a practical man, it would strike you" —

"Only one thing strikes me, Richardson," interrupted

Bradley, in a singularly distinct whisper, rising and moving nearer the speaker; "it is that you 're sitting perilously near the edge of this veranda. For, by the living God, if you don't take yourself out of that chair and out of this house, I won't be answerable for the consequences!"

"Hold on there a minute, will you?" said Mainwaring's voice from the window.

Both men turned towards it. A long leg was protruding from Mainwaring's window; it was quickly followed by the other leg and body of the occupant, and the next moment Mainwaring came towards the two men, with his hands in his pockets.

"Not so loud," he said, looking towards the house.

"Let that man go," said Bradley in a repressed voice. "You and I, Mainwaring, can speak together afterwards."

"That man must stay until he hears what I have got to say," said Mainwaring, stepping between them. He was very white and grave in the moonlight, but very quiet; and he did not take his hands from his pockets. "I 've listened to what he said because he came here on *my* business, which was simply to offer to do you a service. That was all, Bradley, that *I* told him to do. This rot about what he expects of you in return is his own impertinence. If you 'd punched his head when he began it, it would have been all right. But since he has begun it, before he goes I think he ought to hear me tell you that I have already *offered* myself to Miss Macy, and she has *refused* me! If she had given me the least encouragement, I should have told you before. Further, I want to say that, in spite of that man's insinuations, I firmly believe that no one is aware of the circumstance except Miss Macy and myself."

"I had no idea of intimating that anything had happened that was not highly honorable and creditable to you and the young lady," began Richardson hurriedly.

"I don't know that it was necessary for you to have any ideas on the subject at all," said Mainwaring sternly; "nor that, having been shown how you have insulted this gentleman and myself, you need trouble us an instant longer with your company. You need not come back. I will manage my other affairs myself."

"Very well, Mr. Mainwaring — but — you may be sure that I shall certainly take the first opportunity to explain myself to Sir Robert," returned Richardson, as, with an attempt at dignity, he strode away.

There was an interval of silence.

"Don't be too hard upon a fellow, Bradley," said Mainwaring, as Bradley remained dark and motionless in the shadow. "It is a poor return I 'm making you for your kindness, but I swear I never thought of anything like — like — this."

"Nor did I," said Bradley bitterly.

"I know it, and that 's what makes it so infernally bad for me. Forgive me, won't you? Think of me, old fellow, as the wretchedest ass you ever met, but not such a cad as this would make me!" As Mainwaring stepped out from the moonlight towards him with extended hand, Bradley grasped it warmly.

"Thanks — there — thanks, old fellow! And, Bradley — I say — don't say anything to your wife, for I don't think she knows it. And, Bradley — look here — I did n't like to be anything but plain before that fellow; but I don't mind telling *you*, now that it 's all over, that I really think Louise — Miss Macy — did n't altogether understand me either."

With another shake of the hand they separated for the night. For a long time after Mainwaring had gone, Bradley remained gazing thoughtfully into the Great Cañon. He thought of the time when he had first come there, full of life and enthusiasm, making an ideal world of his pure

and wholesome eyrie on the ledge. What else he thought will probably never be known until the misunderstanding of honorable and chivalrous men by a charming and illogical sex shall incite the audacious pen of some more daring romancer.

When he returned to the house, he said kindly to his wife, "I have been thinking to-day about your hotel scheme, and I shall write to Sacramento to-night to accept that capitalist's offer."

CHAPTER V

The sun was just rising. In two years of mutation and change it had seen the little cottage clinging like a swallow's nest to the rocky caves of a great Sierran cañon give way to a straggling, many-galleried hotel, and a dozen blackened chimneys rise above the barren tableland where once had stood the lonely forge. To that conservative orb of light and heat there must have been a peculiar satisfaction in looking down a few hours earlier upon the battlements and gables of Oldenhurst, whose base was deeply imbedded in the matured foundations and settled traditions of an English county. For the rising sun had for ten centuries found Oldenhurst in its place, from the heavy stone terrace that covered the dead-and-forgotten wall, where a Roman sentinel had once paced, to the little grating in the cloistered quadrangle, where it had seen a Cistercian brother place the morning dole. It had daily welcomed the growth of this vast and picturesque excrescence of the times; it had smiled every morning upon this formidable yet quaint incrustation of power and custom, ignoring, as Oldenhurst itself had ignored, the generations who possessed it, the men who built it, the men who carried it with fire and sword, the men who had lied and cringed for it, the king who had given it to a favorite, the few brave hearts who had died for it in exile, and the one or two who had bought and paid for it. For Oldenhurst had absorbed all these and more until it had become a story of the past, incarnate in stone, greenwood, and flower; it had even drained the life-blood from adjacent hamlets, repaying them

with tumuli growths like its own, in the shape of purposeless lodges, quaintly incompetent hospitals and schools, and churches where the inestimable blessing and knowledge of its gospel were taught and fostered. Nor had it dealt more kindly with the gentry within its walls, sending some to the scaffold, pillorying others in infamous office, reducing a few to poverty, and halting its later guests with gout and paralysis. It had given them in exchange the dubious immortality of a portrait gallery, from which they stared with stony and equal resignation; it had preserved their useless armor and accoutrements; it had set up their marble effigies in churches or laid them in cross-legged attitudes to trip up the unwary, until in death, as in life, they got between the congregation and the Truth that was taught there. It had allowed an Oldenhurst crusader, with a broken nose like a pugilist, on the strength of his having been twice to the Holy Land, to hide the beautifully illuminated Word from the lowlier worshiper on the humbler benches; it had sent an iconoclastic Bishop of the Reformation to a nearer minster to ostentatiously occupy the place of the consecrated image he had overthrown. Small wonder that crowding the Oldenhurst retainers gradually into smaller space, with occasional Sabbath glimpses of the living rulers of Oldenhurst already in railed-off exaltation, it had forced them to accept Oldenhurst as a synonym of eternity, and left the knowledge of a higher Power to what time they should be turned out to their longer sleep under the tender grass of the beautiful outer churchyard.

And even so, while every stone of the pile of Oldenhurst and every tree in its leafy park might have been eloquent with the story of vanity, selfishness, and unequal justice, it had been left to the infinite mercy of Nature to seal their lips with a spell of beauty that left mankind equally dumb; earth, air, and moisture had entered into a gentle conspiracy to soften, mellow, and clothe its external blem-

ishes of breach and accident, its irregular design, its additions, accretions, ruins, and lapses with a harmonious charm of outline and color; poets, romancers, and historians had equally conspired to illuminate the dark passages and uglier inconsistencies of its interior life with the glamour of their own fancy. The fragment of menacing keep, with its choked oubliettes, became a bower of tender ivy; the grim story of its crimes, properly edited by a contemporary bard of the family, passed into a charming ballad. Even the superstitious darkness of its religious house had escaped through fallen roof and shattered wall, leaving only the foliated and sun-pierced screen of front, with its rose-window and pinnacle of cross behind. Pilgrims from all lands had come to see it; fierce Republicans had crossed the seas to gaze at its mediæval outlines, and copy them in wood and stucco on their younger soil. Politicians had equally pointed to it as a convincing evidence of their own principles and in refutation of each other; and it had survived both. For it was this belief in its own perpetuity that was its strength and weakness. And that belief was never stronger than on this bright August morning, when it was on the verge of dissolution. A telegram brought to Sir Robert Mainwaring had even then as completely shattered and disintegrated Oldenhurst, in all it was and all it meant, as if the brown-paper envelope had been itself charged with the electric fluid.

Sir Robert Mainwaring, whose family had for three centuries possessed Oldenhurst, had received the news of his financial ruin; and the vast pile, which had survived the repeated invasion of superstition, force, intrigue, and even progress, had succumbed to a foe its founders and proprietors had loftily ignored and left to Jews and traders. The acquisition of money, except by despoilment, gift, royal favor, or inheritance, had been unknown at Oldenhurst. The present degenerate custodian of its fortunes,

staggering under the weight of its sentimental mortmain already alluded to, had speculated in order to keep up its material strength, that was gradually shrinking through impoverished land and the ruined trade it had despised. He had invested largely in California mines, and was the chief shareholder in a San Francisco bank. But the mines had proved worthless, the Bank had that morning suspended payment, owing to the failure of a large land and timber company on the Sierras which it had imprudently "carried." The spark which had demolished Oldenhurst had been fired from the new telegraph station in the hotel above the great Sierran cañon.

There was a large house party at Oldenhurst that morning. But it had been a part of the history of the Mainwarings to accept defeat gallantly and as became their blood. Sir Percival, — the second gentleman on the left as you entered the library, — unhorsed, dying on a distant moor, with a handful of followers, abandoned by a charming Prince and a miserable cause, was scarcely a greater hero than this ruined but undaunted gentleman of eighty, entering the breakfast-room a few hours later as jauntily as his gout would permit, and conscientiously dispensing the hospitalities of his crumbling house. When he had arranged a few pleasure parties for the day and himself thoughtfully anticipated the different tastes of his guests, he turned to Lady Mainwaring.

"Don't forget that somebody ought to go to the station to meet the Bradleys. Frank writes from St. Moritz that they are due here to-day."

Lady Mainwaring glanced quickly at her husband, and said *sotto voce*, "Do you think they 'll care to come *now?* They probably have heard all about it."

"Not how it affects me," returned Sir Robert in the same tone; "and as they might think that because Frank was with them on that California mountain we would be-

lieve it had something to do with Richardson involving the Bank in that wretched company, we must really *insist* upon their coming."

"Bradley!" echoed the Hon. Captain FitzHarry, overhearing the name during a late forage on the sideboard, "Bradley! — there was an awfully pretty American at Biarritz, traveling with a cousin, I think — a Miss Mason or Macy. Those sort of people, you know, who have a companion as pretty as themselves; bring you down with the other barrel if one misses — eh? Very clever, both of them, and hardly any accent."

"Mr. Bradley was a very dear friend of Frank's, and most kind to him," said Lady Mainwaring gravely.

"Did n't know there *was* a Mr. Bradley, really. He did n't come to the fore then," said the unabashed captain. "Deuced hard to follow up those American husbands!"

"And their wives would n't thank you if you did," said Lady Griselda Armiger, with a sweet smile.

"If it is the Mrs. Bradley I mean," said Lady Canterbridge, from the lower end of the table, looking up from her letter, "who looks a little like Mrs. Summertree, and has a pretty cousin with her who has very good frocks, I 'm afraid you won't be able to get her down here. She 's booked with engagements for the next six weeks. She and her cousin made all the running at Grigsby Royal, and she has quite deposed that other American beauty in Northforeland's good graces. She regularly *affiché'd* him, and it is piteous to see him follow her about. No, my dear; I don't believe they 'll come to any one of less rank than a marquis. If they did, I 'm sure Canterbridge would have had them at Buckenthorpe already."

"I wonder if there was ever anything in Frank's admiration of this Miss Macy?" said Lady Mainwaring a few moments later, lingering beside her husband in his study.

"I really don't know," said Sir Robert abstractedly:

"his letters were filled with her praises, and Richardson thought" —

"Pray don't mention that man's name again," said Lady Mainwaring, with the first indication of feeling she had shown. "I should n't trust him."

"But why do you ask?" returned her husband.

Lady Mainwaring was silent for a moment. "She is very rich, I believe," she said slowly. "At least, Frank writes that some neighbors of theirs whom he met in the Engadine told him they had sold the site of that absurd cottage where he was ill for some extravagant sum."

"My dear Geraldine," said the old man affectionately, taking his wife's hand in his own, that now for the first time trembled, "if you have any hope based upon what you are thinking of now, let it be the last and least. You forget that Paget told us that with the best care he could scarcely insure Frank's return to perfect health. Even if God in his mercy spared him long enough to take my place, what girl would be willing to tie herself to a man doomed to sickness and poverty? Hardly the one you speak of, my dear."

Lady Canterbridge proved a true prophet. Mrs. Bradley and Miss Macy did not come, regretfully alleging a previous engagement made on the Continent with the Duke of Northforeland and the Marquis of Dungeness; but the unexpected and apocryphal husband *did* arrive. "I myself have not seen my wife and cousin since I returned from my visit to your son in Switzerland. I am glad they were able to amuse themselves without waiting for me at a London hotel, though I should have preferred to have met them here." Sir Robert and Lady Mainwaring were courteous but slightly embarrassed. Lady Canterbridge, who had come to the station in bored curiosity, raised her clear blue eyes to his. He did not look like a fool, a complaisant or fashionably cynical husband — this well-dressed, well-

mannered, but quietly and sympathetically observant man. Did he really care for his selfish wife? was it perfect trust or some absurd transatlantic custom? She did not understand him. It wearied her and she turned her eyes indifferently away. Bradley, a little irritated, he knew not why, at the scrutiny of this tall, handsome, gentlemanly looking woman, who, however, in spite of her broad shoulders and narrow hips, possessed a refined muliebrity superior to mere womanliness of outline, turned slightly towards Sir Robert. "Lady Canterbridge, Frank's cousin," explained Sir Robert hesitatingly, as if conscious of some vague awkwardness. Bradley and Lady Canterbridge both bowed, — possibly the latter's salutation was the most masculine, — and Bradley, eventually forgetting her presence, plunged into an earnest, sympathetic, and intelligent account of the condition in which he had found the invalid at St. Moritz. The old man at first listened with an almost perfunctory courtesy and a hesitating reserve; but as Bradley was lapsing into equal reserve and they drove up to the gates of the quadrangle, he unexpectedly warmed with a word or two of serious welcome. Looking up with a half-unconscious smile, Bradley met Lady Canterbridge's examining eyes.

The next morning, finding an opportunity to be alone with him, Bradley, with a tactful mingling of sympathy and directness, informed his host that he was cognizant of the disaster that had overtaken the Bank, and delicately begged him to accept of any service he could render him. "Pardon me," he said, "if I speak as plainly to you as I would to your son: my friendship for him justifies an equal frankness to any one he loves; but I should not intrude upon your confidence if I did not believe that my knowledge and assistance might be of benefit to you. Although I did not sell my lands to Richardson or approve of his methods," he continued, "I fear it was some sugges-

tion of mine that eventually induced him to form the larger and more disastrous scheme that ruined the Bank. So you see," he added lightly, "I claim a right to offer you my services." Touched by Bradley's sincerity and discreet intelligence, Sir Robert was equally frank. During the recital of his Californian investments — a chronicle of almost fatuous speculation and imbecile enterprise — Bradley was profoundly moved at the naïve ignorance of business and hopeless ingenuousness of this old *habitué* of a cynical world and an intriguing and insincere society, to whom no scheme had been too wild for acceptance. As Bradley listened with a half-saddened smile to the grave visions of this aged enthusiast, he remembered the son's unsophisticated simplicity: what he had considered as the "boyishness" of immaturity was the taint of the utterly unpractical Mainwaring blood. It was upon this blood, and others like it, that Oldenhurst had for centuries waxed and fattened.

Bradley was true to his promise of assistance, and, with the aid of two or three of his brother-millionaires, whose knowledge of the resources of the locality was no less powerful and convincing than the security of their actual wealth, managed to stay the immediate action of the catastrophe until the affairs of the Sierran Land and Timber Company could be examined and some plan of reconstruction arranged. During this interval of five months, in which the credit of Sir Robert Mainwaring was preserved with the secret of his disaster, Bradley was a frequent and welcome visitor to Oldenhurst. Apart from his strange and chivalrous friendship for the Mainwarings, — which was as incomprehensible to Sir Robert as Sir Robert's equally eccentric and Quixotic speculations had been to Bradley, — he began to feel a singular and weird fascination for the place. A patient martyr in the vast London house he had taken for his wife's and cousin's amusement, he loved to escape the loneliness of its autumn solitude or the occasional greater

loneliness of his wife's social triumphs. The handsome, thoughtful man who sometimes appeared at the foot of his wife's table or melted away like a well-bred ghost in the hollow emptiness of her brilliant receptions, piqued the languid curiosity of a few. A distinguished personage, known for his tactful observance of *convenances* that others forgot, had made a point of challenging this gentlemanly apparition, and had followed it up with courteous civilities, which led to exchange of much respect, but no increase of acquaintance. He had even spent a week at Buckenthorpe, with Canterbridge in the coverts and Lady Canterbridge in the music-room and library. He had returned more thoughtful, and for some time after was more frequent in his appearances at home, and more earnest in his renewed efforts to induce his wife to return to America with him.

"You 'll never be happy anywhere but in California, among those common people," she replied; "and while I was willing to share your poverty *there*," she added dryly, "I prefer to share your wealth among civilized ladies and gentlemen. Besides," she continued, "we must consider Louise. She is as good as engaged to Lord Dunshunner, and I do not intend that you shall make a mess of her affairs here as you did in California."

It was the first time he had heard of Lord Dunshunner's proposals; it was the first allusion she had ever made to Louise and Mainwaring.

Meantime, the autumn leaves had fallen silently over the broad terraces of Oldenhurst, with little changes to the fortunes of the great house itself. The Christmas house party included Lady Canterbridge, whose husband was still detained at Homburg in company with Dunshunner, and Bradley, whose wife and cousin lingered on the Continent. He was slightly embarrassed when Lady Canterbridge turned to him one afternoon as they were returning

from the lake and congratulated him abruptly upon Louise's engagement.

"Perhaps you don't care to be congratulated," she said, as he did not immediately respond, "and you had as little to do with it as with that other? It is a woman's function."

"What other?" echoed Bradley.

Lady Canterbridge slightly turned her handsome head towards him as she walked unbendingly at his side. "Tell me how you manage to keep your absolute simplicity so fresh. Do you suppose it was n't known at Oldenhurst that Frank had quite compromised himself with Miss Macy over there?"

"It certainly was not known 'over there,'" said Bradley curtly.

"Don't be angry with me."

Such an appeal from the tall, indifferent woman at his side, so confidently superior to criticism, and uttered in a lower tone, made him smile, albeit uneasily.

"I only meant to congratulate you," she continued carelessly. "Dunshunner is not a bad sort of fellow, and will come into a good property some day. And then, society is so made up of caprice, just now, that it is well for your wife's cousin to make the most of her opportunities while they last. She is very popular now; but next season" — Seeing that Bradley remained silent, she did not finish her sentence, but said with her usual abruptness, "Do you know a Miss Araminta Eulalie Sharpe?"

Bradley started. Could any one recognize honest Minty in the hopeless vulgarity which this fine lady had managed to carelessly import into her name? His eye kindled.

"She is an old friend of mine, Lady Canterbridge."

"How fortunate! Then I can please you by giving you good news of her. She is the coming sensation. They say she is very rich, but quite one of the people, you know:

in fact, she makes no scruples of telling you her father was a blacksmith, I think, and takes the dear old man with her everywhere. FitzHarry raves about her, and says her *naïveté* is something too delicious. She is regularly in with some of the best people already. Lady Dungeness has taken her up, and Northforeland is only waiting for your cousin's engagement to be able to go over decently. Shall I ask her to Buckenthorpe? — come, now, as an apology for my rudeness to your cousin?" She was very womanly now in spite of her high collar, her straight back, and her tightly fitting jacket, as she stood there smiling. Suddenly her smile faded; she drew her breath in quickly.

She had caught a glimpse of his usually thoughtful face and eyes, now illuminated with some pleasant memory.

"Thank you," he said smilingly, yet with a certain hesitation, as he thought of The Lookout and Araminta Eulalie Sharpe, and tried to reconcile them with the lady before him. "I should like it very much."

"Then you have known Miss Sharpe a long time?" continued Lady Canterbridge as they walked on.

"While we were at The Lookout she was our nearest neighbor."

"And I suppose your wife will consider it quite proper for you to see her again at my house?" said Lady Canterbridge, with a return of conventional levity.

"Oh! quite," said Bradley.

They had reached the low Norman-arched side entrance to the quadrangle. As Bradley swung open the bolt-studded oaken door to let her pass, she said carelessly: —

"Then you are not coming in now?"

"No; I shall walk a little longer."

"And I am quite forgiven?"

"I am thanking you very much," he said, smiling directly into her blue eyes. She lowered them, and vanished into the darkness of the passage.

The news of Minty's success was further corroborated by Sir Robert, who later that evening called Bradley into the study. "Frank has been writing from Nice that he has renewed his acquaintance with some old Californian friends of yours — a Mr. and Miss Sharpe. Lady Canterbridge says that they are well known in London to some of our friends, but I would like to ask you something about them. Lady Mainwaring was on the point of inviting them here when I received a letter from Mr. Sharpe asking for a *business* interview. Pray who is this Sharpe?"

"You say he writes for a *business* interview?" asked Bradley.

"Yes."

Bradley hesitated for a moment and then said quietly, "Perhaps, then, I am justified in a breach of confidence to him, in order to answer your question. He is the man who has assumed all the liabilities of the Sierran Land and Timber Company to enable the Bank to resume payment. But he did it on the condition that you were never to know it. For the rest he was a blacksmith who made a fortune, as Lady Canterbridge will tell you."

"How very odd — how kind, I mean! I should like to have been civil to him on Frank's account alone."

"I should see him on business and be civil to him afterwards." Sir Robert received the American's levity with his usual seriousness.

"No, they must come here for Christmas. His daughter is" —

"Araminta Eulalie Sharpe," said Bradley in defiant memory of Lady Canterbridge.

Sir Robert winced audibly. "I shall rely on you, my dear boy, to help me make it pleasant for them," he said.

Christmas came, but not Minty. It drew a large contingent from Oldenhurst to the quaint old church, who came to view the green-wreathed monuments, and walls

spotted with crimson berries, as if with the blood of former Oldenhurst warriors, and to impress the wondering villagers with the ineffable goodness and bounty of the Creator towards the Lords of Oldenhurst and their friends. Sir Robert, a little gouty, kept the house, and Bradley, somewhat uneasy at the Sharpes' absence, but more distrait with other thoughts, wandered listlessly in the long library. At the lower angle it was embayed into the octagon space of a former tower, which was furnished as a quaint recess for writing or study, pierced through its enormous walls with a lance-shaped window, hidden by heavy curtains. He was gazing abstractedly at the melancholy eyes of Sir Percival, looking down from the dark panel opposite, when he heard the crisp rustle of a skirt. Lady Canterbridge, tightly and stiffly buttoned in black from her long, narrow boots to her slim, white-collared neck, stood beside him with a Prayer-Book in her ungloved hand. Bradley colored quickly; the penetrating incense of the Christmas boughs and branches that decked the walls and ceilings, mingled with some indefinable intoxicating aura from the woman at his side, confused his senses. He seemed to be losing himself in some forgotten past coeval with the long, quaintly lighted room, the rich hangings, and the painted ancestor of this handsome woman. He recovered himself with an effort, and said, "You are going to church?"

"I may meet them coming home; it 's all the same. You like *him?*" she said abruptly, pointing to the portrait. "I thought you did not care for that sort of man over there."

"A man like that must have felt the impotence of his sacrifice before he died, and that condoned everything," said Bradley thoughtfully.

"Then you don't think him a fool? Bob says it was a fair bargain for a title and an office, and that by dying he escaped trial and the confiscation of what he had."

Bradley did not reply.

"I am disturbing your illusions again. Yet I rather like them. I think you are quite capable of a sacrifice — perhaps you know what it is already."

He felt that she was looking at him; he felt equally that he could not respond with a commonplace. He was silent.

"I have offended you again, Mr. Bradley," she said. "Please be Christian, and pardon me. You know this is a season of peace and good will." She raised her blue eyes at the same moment to the Christmas decorations on the ceiling. They were standing before the parted drapery of the lance window. Midway between the arched curtains hung a spray of mistletoe — the conceit of a mischievous housemaid. Their eyes met it simultaneously.

Bradley had Lady Canterbridge's slim, white hand in his own. The next moment voices were heard in the passage, and the door nearly opposite to them opened deliberately. The idea of their apparent seclusion and half-compromising attitude flashed through the minds of both at the same time. Lady Canterbridge stepped quickly backward, drawing Bradley with her, into the embrasure of the window; the folds of the curtain swung together and concealed them from view.

The door had been opened by the footman, ushering in a broad-shouldered man, who was carrying a traveling-bag and an umbrella in his hand. Dropping into an armchair before the curtain, he waved away the footman, who, even now, mechanically repeated a previously vain attempt to relieve the stranger of his luggage.

"You leave that 'ere gripsack where it is, young man, and tell Sir Robert Mainwaring that Mr. Demander Sharpe, of Californy, wishes to see him — on business — on *business*, do ye hear? You hang onter that sentence — *on business!* it 's about ez much ez you kin carry, I reckon, and leave that gripsack alone."

From behind the curtain Bradley made a sudden movement to go forward; but Lady Canterbridge — now quite pale but collected — restrained him with a warning movement of her hand. Sir Robert's stick and halting step were next heard along the passage, and he entered the room. His simple and courteous greeting of the stranger was instantly followed by a renewed attack upon the "grip-sack," and a renewed defense of it by the stranger.

"No, Sir Robert," said the voice argumentatively, "this yer 's a *business* interview, and until it 's over — if *you* please — we 'll remain ez we air. I 'm Demander Sharpe, of Californy, and I and my darter, Minty, oncet had the pleasure of knowing your boy over thar, and of meeting him agin the other day at Nice."

"I think," said Sir Robert's voice gently, "that these are not the only claims you have upon me. I have only a day or two ago heard from Mr. Bradley that I owe to your generous hands and your disinterested liberality the saving of my California fortune."

There was the momentary sound of a pushed-back chair, a stamping of feet, and then Mr. Sharpe's voice rose high with the blacksmith's old querulous aggrieved utterance: —

"So it 's that finikin', conceited Bradley agin — that 's giv' me away! Ef that man's all-fired belief in his being the Angel Gabriel and Dan'l Webster rolled inter one don't beat anythin'! I suppose that high-flyin' jay-bird kalkilated to put you and me and my gal and yer boy inter harness for his four-hoss chariot and he sittin' kam on the box drivin' us! Why don't he tend to his own business, and look arter his own concerns — instead o' leaving Jinny Bradley and Loo Macy dependent on kings and queens and titled folks gen'rally, and he, Jim Bradley, philanderin' with another man's wife — while that thar man is hard at work tryin' to make a honest livin' fer his wife, buckin' agin faro an' the tiger gen'rally at Monaco! Eh? And

that man a-intermeddlin' with me! Ef," continued the voice, dropped to a tone of hopeless moral conviction, — "ef there 's a man I mor'lly despise — it 's that finikin' Jim Bradley."

"You quite misunderstand me, my dear sir," said Sir Robert's hurried voice; "he told me you had pledged him to secrecy, and he only revealed it to explain why you wished to see me."

There was a grunt of half-placated wrath from Sharpe, and then the voice resumed, but more deliberately, "Well, to come back to business: you 've got a boy, Francis, and I 've got a darter, Araminty. They 've sorter taken a shine to each other and they want to get married. Mind yer — wait a moment! — it was n't allus so. No, sir; when my gal Araminty first seed your boy in Californy she was poor, and she did n't kalkilate to get inter anybody's family unbeknownst or on sufferance. Then she got rich and you got poor; and then — hold on a minit! — she allows, does my girl, that there ain't any nearer chance o' their making a match than they were afore, for she is n't goin' to hev it said that she married your son fur the chance of some day becomin' Lady Mainwaring."

"One moment, Mr. Sharpe," said the voice of the baronet gravely: "I am both flattered and pained by what I believe to be the kindly object of your visit. Indeed, I may say I have gathered a suspicion of what might be the sequel of this most unhappy acquaintance of my son and your daughter; but I cannot believe that he has kept you in ignorance of his unfortunate prospects and his still more unfortunate state of health."

"When I told ye to hold on a minit," continued the blacksmith's voice, with a touch of querulousness in its accent, "that was jist wot I was comin' to. I knowed part of it from my own pocket, she knowed the rest of it from his lip and the doctors she interviewed. And then she

says to me — sez my girl Minty — 'Pop,' she sez, 'he 's got nothing to live for now but his title, and that he never may live to get, so that I think ye kin jist go, pop, and fairly and squarely, as a honest man, ask his father to let me hev him.' Them 's my darter's own words, Sir Robert, and when I tell yer that she 's got a million o' dollars to back them, ye 'll know she means business every time."

"Did Francis know that you were coming here?"

"Bless ye, no! He don't know that she would have him. Ef it kem to that, he ain't even asked her! She would n't let him until she was sure of *you*."

"Then you meant to say there is no engagement?"

"In course not. I reckoned to do the square thing first with ye."

The halting step of the baronet crossing the room was heard distinctly. He had stopped beside Sharpe. "My dear Mr. Sharpe," he said in a troubled voice, "I cannot permit this sacrifice. It is too — too great!"

"Then," said Sharpe's voice querulously, "I 'm afraid we must do without your permission. I did n't reckon to find a sort o' British Jim Bradley in you. If *you* can't permit my darter to sacrifice herself by marryin' your son, I can't permit her to sacrifice her love and him by *not* marryin' him. So I reckon this yer interview is over."

"I am afraid we are both old fools, Mr. Sharpe; but — we will talk this over with Lady Mainwaring. Come" — There was evidently a slight struggle near the chair over some inanimate object. But the next moment the baronet's voice rose persuasively, "Really, I must insist upon relieving you of your bag and umbrella."

"Well, if you 'll let me telegraph 'yes' to Minty, I don't care if yer do."

When the room was quiet again, Lady Canterbridge and James Bradley silently slipped from the curtain, and, without a word, separated at the door.

There was a merry Christmas at Oldenhurst and at Nice. But whether Minty's loving sacrifice was accepted or not, or whether she ever reigned as Lady Mainwaring, or lived an untitled widow, I cannot say. But as Oldenhurst still exists in all its pride and power, it is presumed that the peril that threatened its fortunes was averted, and that if another heroine was not found worthy of a frame in its picture-gallery, at least it had been sustained as of old by devotion and renunciation.

THROUGH THE SANTA CLARA WHEAT

CHAPTER I

It was an enormous wheat-field in the Santa Clara valley, stretching to the horizon line unbroken. The meridian sun shone upon it without glint or shadow; but at times, when a stronger gust of the trade-winds passed over it, there was a quick slanting impression of the whole surface that was, however, as unlike a billow as itself was unlike a sea. Even when a lighter zephyr played down its long level, the agitation was superficial, and seemed only to momentarily lift a veil of greenish mist that hung above its immovable depths. Occasional puffs of dust alternately rose and fell along an imaginary line across the field, as if a current of air were passing through it, but were otherwise inexplicable.

Suddenly a faint shout, apparently somewhere in the vicinity of the line, brought out a perfectly clear response, followed by the audible murmur of voices, which it was impossible to localize. Yet the whole field was so devoid of any suggestion of human life or motion that it seemed rather as if the vast expanse itself had become suddenly articulate and intelligible.

"Wot say?"

"Wheel off."

"Where?"

"In the road."

One of the voices here indicated itself in the direction of the line of dust, and said, "Comin'," and a man stepped out from the wheat into a broad and dusty avenue.

With his presence three things became apparent.

First, that the puffs of dust indicated the existence of the invisible avenue through the unlimited and unfenced field of grain; secondly, that the stalks of wheat on either side of it were so tall as to actually hide a passing vehicle; and thirdly, that a vehicle had just passed, had lost a wheel, and been dragged partly into the grain by its frightened horse, which a dusty man was trying to restrain and pacify.

The horse, given up to equine hysterics, and evidently convinced that the ordinary buggy behind him had been changed into some dangerous and appalling creation, still plunged and kicked violently to rid himself of it. The man who had stepped out of the depths of the wheat quickly crossed the road, unhitched the traces, drew back the vehicle, and glancing at the traveler's dusty and disordered clothes, said, with curt sympathy: —

"Spilt, too; but not hurt, eh?"

"No, neither of us. I went over with the buggy when the wheel cramped, but *she* jumped clear."

He made a gesture indicating the presence of another. The man turned quickly. There was a second figure, a young girl standing beside the grain from which he had emerged, embracing a few stalks of wheat with one arm and a hand in which she still held her parasol, while she grasped her gathered skirts with the other, and trying to find a secure foothold for her two neat narrow slippers on a crumbling cake of adobe above the fathomless dust of the roadway. Her face, although annoyed and discontented, was pretty, and her light dress and slim figure were suggestive of a certain superior condition.

The man's manner at once softened with Western courtesy. He swung his broad-brimmed hat from his head, and bent his body with the ceremoniousness of the country ballroom. "I reckon the lady had better come up to the

shanty out o' the dust and sun till we kin help you get these things fixed," he said to the driver. "I 'll send round by the road for your hoss, and have one of mine fetch up your wagon."

"Is it far?" asked the girl, slightly acknowledging his salutation, without waiting for her companion to reply.

"Only a step this way," he answered, motioning to the field of wheat beside her.

"What! In *there?* I never could go in there," she said decidedly.

"It 's a heap shorter than by the road, and not so dusty. I 'll go with you, and pilot you."

The young girl cast a vexed look at her companion as the probable cause of all this trouble, and shook her head. But at the same moment one little foot slipped from the adobe into the dust again. She instantly clambered back with a little feminine shriek, and ejaculated, "Well, of all things!" and then, fixing her blue annoyed eyes on the stranger, asked impatiently, "Why could n't I go there by the road in the wagon? I could manage to hold on and keep in."

"Because I reckon you 'd find it too pow'ful hot waitin' here till we got round to ye."

There was no doubt it was very hot; the radiation from the baking roadway beating up under her parasol, and pricking her cheekbones and eyeballs like needles. She gave a fastidious little shudder, furled her parasol, gathered her skirts still tighter, faced about, and said, "Go on, then." The man slipped backwards into the ranks of stalks, parting them with one hand, and holding out the other as if to lead her. But she evaded the invitation by holding her tightly drawn skirt with both hands, and bending her head forward as if she had not noticed it. The next moment the road, and even the whole outer world, disappeared behind them, and they seemed floating in a choking green translucent mist.

But the effect was only momentary; a few steps further she found that she could walk with little difficulty between the ranks of stalks, which were regularly spaced, and the resemblance now changed to that of a long pillared conservatory of greenish glass, that touched all objects with its pervading hue. She also found that the close air above her head was continually freshened by the interchange of currents of lower temperature from below, — as if the whole vast field had a circulation of its own, — and that the adobe beneath her feet was gratefully cool to her tread. There was no dust, as he had said; what had at first half suffocated her seemed to be some stimulating aroma of creation that filled the narrow green aisles, and now imparted a strange vigor and excitement to her as she walked along. Meantime her guide was not conversationally idle. Now, no doubt, she had never seen anything like this before? It was ordinary wheat, only it was grown on adobe soil — the richest in the valley. These stalks, she could see herself, were ten and twelve feet high. That was the trouble, they all ran too much to stalk, though the grain yield was "suthin' pow'ful." She could tell that to her friends, for he reckoned she was the only young lady that had ever walked under such a growth. Perhaps she was new to Californy? He thought so from the start. Well, this was Californy, and this was not the least of the ways it could "lay over" every other country on God's yearth. Many folks thought it was the gold and the climate, but she could see for herself what it could do with wheat. He wondered if her brother had ever told her of it? No, the stranger was n't her brother. Nor cousin, nor company? No; only the hired driver from a San José hotel, who was takin' her over to Major Randolph's. Yes, he knew the old major; the ranch was a pretty place, nigh unto three miles further on. Now that he knew the driver was no relation of hers he did n't mind telling her that the

buggy was a "rather old consarn," and the driver did n't know his business. Yes, it might be fixed up so as to take her over to the major's; there was one of their own men — a young fellow — who could do anything that *could* be done with wood and iron, — a reg'lar genius! — and *he'd* tackle it. It might take an hour, but she 'd find it quite cool waiting in the shanty. It was a rough place, for they only camped out there during the season to look after the crop, and lived at their own homes the rest of the time. Was she going to stay long at the major's? He noticed she had not brought her trunk with her. Had she known the major's wife long? Perhaps she thought of settling in the neighborhood?

All this naïve, good-humored questioning — so often cruelly misunderstood as mere vulgar curiosity, but as often the courteous instinct of simple unaffected people to entertain the stranger by inviting him to talk of what concerns himself rather than their own selves — was, nevertheless, I fear, met only by monosyllables from the young lady or an impatient question in return. She scarcely raised her eyes to the broad jean-shirted back that preceded her through the grain until the man abruptly ceased talking, and his manner, without losing its half-paternal courtesy, became graver. She was beginning to be conscious of her incivility, and was trying to think of something to say, when he exclaimed, with a slight air of relief, "Here we are!" and the shanty suddenly appeared before them.

It certainly was very rough — a mere shell of unpainted boards that scarcely rose above the level of the surrounding grain, and a few yards distant was invisible. Its slightly sloping roof, already warped and shrunken into long fissures that permitted glimpses of the steel-blue sky above, was evidently intended only as a shelter from the cloudless sun in those two months of rainless days and dewless nights when it was inhabited. Through the open

doors and windows she could see a row of "bunks," or rude sleeping berths against the walls, furnished with coarse mattresses and blankets. As the young girl halted, the man, with an instinct of delicacy, hurried forward, entered the shanty, and dragging a rude bench to the doorway, placed it so that she could sit beneath the shade of the roof, yet with her back to these domestic revelations. Two or three men, who had been apparently lounging there, rose quietly, and unobtrusively withdrew. Her guide brought her a tin cup of deliciously cool water, exchanged a few hurried words with his companions, and then disappeared with them, leaving her alone.

Her first sense of relief from their company was, I fear, stronger than any other feeling. After a hurried glance around the deserted apartment, she arose, shook out her dress and mantle, and then going into the darkest corner supported herself with one hand against the wall while with the other she drew off, one by one, her slippers from her slim, striped-stockinged feet, shook and blew out the dust that had penetrated within, and put them on again. Then, perceiving a triangular fragment of looking-glass nailed against the wall, she settled the strings of her bonnet by the aid of its reflection, patted the fringe of brown hair on her forehead with her separated five fingers as if playing an imaginary tune on her brow, and came back with maidenly abstraction to the doorway.

Everything was quiet, and her seclusion seemed unbroken. A smile played for an instant in the soft shadows of her eyes and mouth as she recalled the abrupt withdrawal of the men. Then her mouth straightened and her brows slightly bent. It was certainly very unmannerly in them to go off in that way. "Good heavens! could n't they have stayed around without talking? Surely it did n't require four men to go and bring up that wagon!" She picked up her parasol from the bench with an impatient

little jerk. Then she held out her ungloved hand into the hot sunshine beyond the door with the gesture she would have used had it been raining, and withdrew it as quickly —her hand quite scorched in the burning rays. Nevertheless, after another impatient pause she desperately put up her parasol and stepped from the shanty.

Presently she was conscious of a faint sound of hammering not far away. Perhaps there was another shed, but hidden, like everything else, in this monotonous, ridiculous grain. Some stalks, however, were trodden down and broken around the shanty; she could move more easily and see where she was going. To her delight, a few steps further brought her into a current of the trade-wind and a cooler atmosphere. And a short distance beyond them, certainly, was the shed from which the hammering proceeded. She approached it boldly.

It was simply a roof upheld by rude uprights and cross-beams, and open to the breeze that swept through it. At one end was a small blacksmith's forge, some machinery, and what appeared to be part of a small steam engine. Midway of the shed was a closet or cupboard fastened with a large padlock. Occupying its whole length on the other side was a workbench, and at the further end stood the workman she had heard.

He was apparently only a year or two older than herself, and clad in blue jean overalls, blackened and smeared with oil and coal-dust. Even his youthful face, which he turned towards her, had a black smudge running across it and almost obliterating a small auburn mustache. The look of surprise that he gave her, however, quickly passed; he remained patiently and in a half-preoccupied way, holding his hammer in his hand, as she advanced. This was evidently the young fellow who could "do anything that could be done with wood and iron."

She was very sorry to disturb him, but could he tell her

how long it would be before the wagon could be brought up and mended? He could not say that until he himself saw what was to be done; if it was only a matter of the wheel he could fix it up in a few moments; if, as he had been told, it was a case of twisted or bent axle, it would take longer, but it would be here very soon. Ah, then, would he let her wait here, as she was very anxious to know at once, and it was much cooler than in the shed? Certainly; he would go over and bring her a bench. But here she begged he would n't trouble himself, she could sit anywhere comfortably.

The lower end of the workbench was covered with clean and odorous shavings; she lightly brushed them aside, and with a youthful movement, swung herself to a seat upon it, supporting herself on one hand as she leaned towards him. She could thus see that his eyes were of a light yellowish-brown, like clarified honey, with a singular look of clear concentration in them, which, however, was the same whether turned upon his work, the surrounding grain, or upon her. This, and his sublime unconsciousness of the smudge across his face and his blackened hands, made her wonder if the man who could do everything with wood and iron was above doing anything with water. She had half a mind to tell him of it, particularly as she noticed also that his throat below the line of sunburn disclosed by his open collar was quite white, and his grimy hands well made. She was wondering whether he would be affronted if she said in her politest way, "I beg your pardon, but do you know you have quite accidentally got something on your face," and offered her handkerchief, which, of course, he would decline, when her eye fell on the steam engine.

"How odd! Do you use that on the farm?"

"No," — he smiled here, the smudge accenting it and setting off his white teeth in a Christy Minstrel fashion

that exasperated her — no, although it *could* be used, and had been. But it was his first effort, made two years ago, when he was younger and more inexperienced. It was a rather rough thing, she could see — but he had to make it at odd times with what iron he could pick up or pay for, and at different forges where he worked.

She begged his pardon — where —

Where he worked.

Ah, then he was the machinist or engineer here?

No, he worked here just like the others, only he was allowed to put up a forge while the grain was green, and have his bench in consideration of the odd jobs he could do in the way of mending tools, etc. There was a heap of mending and welding to do — she had no idea how quickly agricultural machines got out of order! He had done much of his work on the steam engine on moonlit nights. Yes; she had no idea how perfectly clear and light it was here in the valley on such nights; although of course the shadows were very dark, and when he dropped a screw or a nut it was difficult to find. He had worked there because it saved time and because it did n't cost anything, and he had nobody to look on or interfere with him. No, it was not lonely; the coyotes and wildcats sometimes came very near, but were always more surprised and frightened than he was; and once a horseman who had strayed off the distant road yonder mistook him for an animal and shot at him twice.

He told all this with such freedom from embarrassment and with such apparent unconsciousness of the blue eyes that were following him, and the light, graceful figure, — which was so near his own that in some of his gestures his grimy hands almost touched its delicate garments, — that, accustomed as she was to a certain masculine aberration in her presence, she was greatly amused by his naïve acceptance of her as an equal. Suddenly, looking frankly in her face, he said: —

"I 'll show you a secret, if you care to see it."

Nothing would please her more.

He glanced hurriedly around, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the padlock that secured the closet she had noticed. Then, reaching within, with infinite care he brought out a small mechanical model.

"There 's an invention of my own. A reaper and thresher combined. I 'm going to have it patented and have a big one made from this model. This will work, as you see."

He then explained to her with great precision how as it moved over the field the double operation was performed by the same motive power. That it would be a saving of a certain amount of labor and time which she could not remember. She did not understand a word of his explanations; she saw only a clean and pretty but complicated toy that under the manipulation of his grimy fingers rattled a number of frail-like staves and worked a number of wheels and drums, yet there was no indication of her ignorance in her sparkling eyes and smiling, breathless attitude. Perhaps she was interested in his own absorption; the revelation of his preoccupation with this model struck her as if he had made her a confidante of some boyish passion for one of her own sex, and she regarded him with the same sympathizing superiority.

"You will make a fortune out of it," she said pleasantly.

Well, he might make enough to be able to go on with some other inventions he had in his mind. They cost money and time, no matter how careful one was.

This was another interesting revelation to the young girl. He not only did not seem to care for the profit his devotion brought him, but even his one beloved ideal might be displaced by another. So like a man, after all!

Her reflections were broken upon by the sound of voices. The young man carefully replaced the model in its closet

with a parting glance as if he was closing a shrine, and said, "There comes the wagon." The young girl turned to face the men who were dragging it from the road, with the half-complacent air of having been victorious over their late rude abandonment, but they did not seem to notice it or to be surprised at her companion, who quickly stepped forward and examined the broken vehicle with workmanlike deliberation.

"I hope you will be able to do something with it," she said sweetly, appealing directly to him. "I should thank you *so much.*"

He did not reply. Presently he looked up to the man who had brought her to the shanty, and said, "The axle 's strained, but it 's safe for five or six miles more of this road. I 'll put the wheel on easily." He paused, and without glancing at her, continued, "You might send her on by the cart."

"Pray don't trouble yourselves," interrupted the young girl, with a pink uprising in her cheeks; "I shall be quite satisfied with the buggy as it stands." Send her on in the cart, indeed! Really, they were a rude set — *all* of them.

Without taking the slightest notice of her remark, the man replied gravely to the young mechanic, "Yes, but we 'll be wanting the cart before it can get back from taking her."

"Her" again. "I assure you the buggy will serve perfectly well — if this — gentleman — will only be kind enough to put on the wheel again," she returned hotly.

The young mechanic at once set to work. The young girl walked apart silently until the wheel was restored to its axle. But to her surprise a different horse was led forward to be harnessed.

"We thought your horse was n't safe in case of another accident," said the first man, with the same smileless consideration. "This one would n't cut up if he was har-

nessed to an earthquake or a worse driver than you've got."

It occurred to her instantly that the more obvious remedy of sending another driver had been already discussed and rejected by them. Yet when her own driver appeared a moment afterwards, she ascended to her seat with some dignity and a slight increase of color.

"I am very much obliged to you all," she said, without glancing at the young inventor.

"Don't mention it, miss."

"Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon." They all took off their hats with the same formal gravity as the horse moved forward, but turned back to their work again before she was out of the field.

CHAPTER II

The ranch of Major Randolph lay on a rich falda of the Coast Range, and overlooked the great wheat plains that the young girl had just left. The house of wood and adobe, buried to its first story in rose-trees and passion-vines, was large and commodious. Yet it contained only the major, his wife, her son and daughter, and the few occasional visitors from San Francisco whom he entertained, and she tolerated.

For the major's household was not entirely harmonious. While a young infantry subaltern at a Gulf station, he had been attracted by the piquant foreign accent and dramatic gestures of a French Creole widow, and — believing them, in the first flush of his youthful passion, more than an offset to the encumbrance of her two children, who, with the memory of various marital infidelities, were all her late husband had left her — had proposed, been accepted, and promptly married to her. Before he obtained his captaincy, she had partly lost her accent, and those dramatic gestures, which had accented the passion of their brief courtship, began to intensify domestic altercation and the bursts of idle jealousy to which she was subject. Whether she was revenging herself on her second husband for the faults of her first is not known, but it was certain that she brought an unhallowed knowledge of the weaknesses, cheap cynicism, and vanity of a foreign predecessor, to sit in judgment upon the simple-minded and chivalrous American soldier who had succeeded him, and who was, in fact, the most loyal of husbands. The natural result of

her skepticism was an espionage and criticism of the wives of the major's brother officers that compelled a frequent change of quarters. When to this was finally added a racial divergence and antipathy, the public disparagement of the customs and education of her female colleagues, and the sudden insistence of a foreign and French dominance in her household beyond any ordinary Creole justification, Randolph, presumably to avoid later international complications, resigned while he was as yet a major. Luckily his latest banishment to an extreme Western outpost had placed him in California during the flood of a speculation epoch. He purchased a valuable Spanish grant to three leagues of land for little over a three months' pay. Following that yearning which compels retired ship captains and rovers of all degrees to buy a farm in their old days, the major, professionally and socially inured to border strife, sought surcease and Arcadian repose in ranching.

It was here that Mrs. Randolph, late relict of the late Scipion l'Hommadieu, devoted herself to bringing up her children after the extremest of French methods, and in resurrecting a "de" from her own family to give a distinct and aristocratic character to their name. The "de Fontanges l'Hommadieu" were, however, only known to their neighbors, after the Western fashion, by their stepfather's name, — when they were known at all — which was seldom. For the boy was unpleasantly conceited as a precocious worldling, and the girl as unpleasantly complacent in her rôle of *ingénue*. The household was completely dominated by Mrs. Randolph. A punctilious Catholic, she attended all the functions of the adjacent Mission, and the shadow of a black soutane at twilight gliding through the wild oat-fields behind the ranch had often been mistaken for a coyote. The peace-loving major did not object to a piety which, while it left his own conscience free, imparted a respectable religious air to his household, and kept him

from the equally distasteful approaches of the Puritanism of his neighbors, and was blissfully unconscious that he was strengthening the antagonistic foreign element in his family with an alien church.

Meantime, as the repaired buggy was slowly making its way towards his house, Major Randolph entered his wife's boudoir with a letter which the San Francisco post had just brought him. A look of embarrassment on his good-humored face strengthened the hard lines of hers; she felt some momentary weakness of her natural enemy, and prepared to give battle.

"I 'm afraid here 's something of a muddle, Josephine," he began, with a deprecating smile. "Mallory, who was coming down here with his daughter, you know" —

"This is the first intimation *I* have had that anything has been settled upon," interrupted the lady, with appalling deliberation.

"However, my dear, you know I told you last week that he thought of bringing her here while he went South on business. You know, being a widower, he has no one to leave her with."

"And I suppose it is the American fashion to intrust one's daughters to any old boon companions?"

"Mallory is an old friend," interrupted the major impatiently. "He knows I 'm married; and although he has never seen *you*, he is quite willing to leave his daughter here."

"Thank you!"

"Come, you know what I mean. The man naturally believes that my wife will be a proper chaperon for his daughter. But that is not the present question. He intended to call here; I expected to take you over to San José to see her and all that, you know; but the fact of it is — that is — it seems from this letter that — he 's been called away sooner than he expected, and that — well — hang it! the girl is actually on her way here now."

"Alone?"

"I suppose so. You know one thinks nothing of that here."

"Or any other propriety, for that matter."

"For Heaven's sake, Josephine, don't be ridiculous! Of course it 's stupid her coming in this way, and Mallory ought to have brought her — but she 's coming, and we must receive her. By Jove! Here she is now!" he added, starting up after a hurried glance through the window. "But what kind of a d—d turnout is that, anyhow?"

It certainly was an odd-looking conveyance that had entered the gates, and was now slowly coming up the drive towards the house. A large draught horse harnessed to a dust-covered buggy, whose strained fore-axle, bent by the last mile of heavy road, had slanted the tops of the fore-wheels towards each other at an alarming angle. The light, graceful dress and elegant parasol of the young girl, who occupied half of its single seat, looked ludicrously pronounced by the side of the slouching figure and grimy duster of the driver, who occupied the other half.

Mrs. Randolph gave a gritty laugh. "I thought you said she was alone. Is that an escort she has picked up, American fashion, on the road?"

"That 's her hired driver, no doubt. Hang it! she can't drive here by herself," retorted the major impatiently, hurrying to the door and down the staircase. But he was instantly followed by his wife. She had no idea of permitting a possible understanding to be exchanged in their first greeting. The late M. l'Hommadieu had been able to impart a whole plan of intrigue in a single word and glance.

Happily, Rose Mallory, already in the hall, in a few words detailed the accident that had befallen her, to the honest sympathy of the major and the coldly polite concern

of Mrs. Randolph, who, in deliberately chosen sentences, managed to convey to the young girl the conviction that accidents of any kind to young ladies were to be regarded as only a shade removed from indiscretions. Rose was impressed, and even flattered, by the fastidiousness of this foreign-appearing woman, and after the fashion of youthful natures, accorded to her the respect due to recognized authority. When to this authority, which was evident, she added a depreciation of the major, I fear that some common instinct of feminine tyranny responded in Rose's breast, and that on the very threshold of the honest soldier's home she tacitly agreed with the wife to look down upon him. Mrs. Randolph departed to inform her son and daughter of their guest's arrival. As a matter of fact, however, they had already observed her approach to the house through the slits of their drawn window-blinds, and those even narrower prejudices and limited comprehensions which their education had fostered. The girl, Adèle, had only grasped the fact that Rose had come to their house in fine clothes, alone with a man, in a broken-down vehicle, and was moved to easy mirth and righteous wonder. The young man, Emile, had agreed with her, with the mental reservation that the guest was pretty, and must eventually fall in love with him. They both, however, welcomed her with a trained politeness and a superficial attention that, while the indifference of her own countrymen in the wheat-field was still fresh in her recollection, struck her with grateful contrast; the major's quiet and unobtrusive kindliness naturally made less impression, or was accepted as a matter of course.

"Well," said the major, cheerfully but tentatively, to his wife when they were alone again, "she seems a nice girl, after all; and a good deal of pluck and character, by Jove! to push on in that broken buggy rather than linger or come in a farm cart, eh?"

"She was alone in that wheat-field," said Mrs. Randolph, with grim deliberation, "for half an hour; she confesses it herself — *talking with a young man!*"

"Yes, but the others had gone for the buggy. And, in the name of Heaven, what would you have her do — hide herself in the grain?" said the major desperately. "Besides," he added, with a recklessness he afterwards regretted, "that mechanical chap they 've got there is really intelligent and worth talking to."

"I have no doubt *she* thought so," said Mrs. Randolph, with a mirthless smile. "In fact, I have observed that the American freedom generally means doing what you *want* to do. Indeed, I wonder she did n't bring him with her! Only I beg, major, that you will not again, in the presence of my daughter, — and I may even say, of my son, — talk lightly of the solitary meetings of young ladies with mechanics, even though their faces were smutty and their clothes covered with oil."

The major here muttered something about there being less danger in a young lady listening to the intelligence of a coarsely dressed laborer than to the compliments of a rose-scented fop, but Mrs. Randolph walked out of the room before he finished the evident platitude.

That night Rose Mallory retired to her room in a state of self-satisfaction that she even felt was to a certain extent a virtue. She was delighted with her reception and with her hostess and family. It was strange her father had not spoken more of *Mrs.* Randolph, who was clearly the superior of his old friend. What fine manners they all had, so different from other people she had known! There was quite an Old World civilization about them; really, it was like going abroad! She would make the most of her opportunity and profit by her visit. She would begin by improving her French; they spoke it perfectly, and with such a pure accent. She would correct certain

errors she was conscious of in her own manners, and copy Mrs. Randolph as much as possible. Certainly, there was a great deal to be said of Mrs. Randolph's way of looking at things. Now she thought of it calmly, there *was* too much informality and freedom in American ways! There was not enough respect due to position and circumstances. Take those men in the wheat-field, for example. Yet here she found it difficult to formulate an indictment against them for "freedom." She would like to go there some day with the Randolphs and let them see what company manners were! She was thoroughly convinced now that her father had done wrong in sending her alone; it certainly was most disrespectful to them and careless of him (she had quite forgotten that she had herself proposed to her father to go alone rather than wait at the hotel), and she must have looked very ridiculous in her fine clothes and the broken-down buggy. When her trunk came by express to-morrow she would look out something more sober. She must remember that she was in a Catholic and religious household now. Ah, yes! how very fine it was to see that priest at dinner in his soutane, sitting down like one of the family, and making them all seem like a picture of some historical and aristocratic romance! And then they were actually "de Fontanges l'Hommadieu." How different he was from that shabby Methodist minister who used to come to see her father in a black cravat with a hideous bow! Really there was something to say for a religion that contained so much picturesque refinement; and for her part — but that will do. I beg to say that I am not writing of any particular snob or feminine monstrosity, but of a very charming creature, who was quite able to say her prayers afterwards like a good girl, and lay her pretty cheek upon her pillow without a blush.

She opened her window and looked out. The moon, a great silver dome, was uplifting itself from a bluish-gray

level, which she knew was the distant plain of wheat. Somewhere in its midst appeared a dull star, at times brightening as if blown upon or drawn upwards in a comet-like trail. By some odd instinct she felt that it was the solitary forge of the young inventor, and pictured him standing before it with his abstracted hazel eyes and a face more begrimed in the moonlight than ever. When *did* he wash himself? Perhaps not until Sunday. How lonely it must be out there! She slightly shivered and turned from the window. As she did so, it seemed to her that something knocked against her door from without. Opening it quickly, she was almost certain that the sound of a rustling skirt retreated along the passage. It was very late; perhaps she had disturbed the house by shutting her window. No doubt it was the motherly interest of Mrs. Randolph that impelled her to come softly and look after her; and for once her simple surmises were correct. For not only the inspecting eyes of her hostess, but the amatory glances of the youthful Emile, had been fastened upon her window until the light disappeared, and even the Holy Mission Church of San José had assured itself of the dear child's safety with a large and supple ear at her keyhole.

The next morning Major Randolph took her with Adèle in a light cariole over the ranch. Although his domain was nearly as large as the adjoining wheat plain, it was not, like that, monopolized by one enormous characteristic yield, but embraced a more diversified product. There were acres and acres of potatoes in rows of endless and varying succession; there were miles of wild oats and barley, which overtopped them as they drove in narrow lanes of dry and dusty monotony; there were orchards of pears, apricots, peaches, and nectarines, and vineyards of grapes, so comparatively dwarfed in height that they scarcely reached to the level of their eyes, yet laden and breaking beneath the weight of their ludicrously disproportionate

fruit. What seemed to be a vast green plateau covered with tiny patches, that headed the northern edge of the prospect, was an enormous bed of strawberry plants. But everywhere, crossing the track, bounding the fields, orchards, and vineyards, intersecting the paths of the whole domain, were narrow irrigating ducts and channels of running water.

"Those," said the major poetically, "are the veins and arteries of the ranch. Come with me now, and I 'll show you its pulsating heart." Descending from the wagon into pedestrian prose again, he led Rose a hundred yards further to a shed that covered a wonderful artesian well. In the centre of a basin a column of water rose regularly with the even flow and volume of a brook. "It is one of the largest in the State," said the major, "and is the life of all that grows here during six months of the year."

Pleased as the young girl was with those evidences of the prosperity and position of her host, she was struck, however, with the fact that the farm-laborers, wine-growers, nurserymen, and all field hands scattered on the vast estate were apparently of the same independent, unpastoral, and unprofessional character as the men of the wheat-field. There were no cottages or farm buildings that she could see, nor any apparent connection between the household and the estate; far from suggesting tenantry or retainers, the men who were working in the fields glanced at them as they passed with the indifference of strangers, or replied to the major's greetings or questionings with perfect equality of manner, or even businesslike reserve and caution. Her host explained that the ranch was worked by a company "on shares;" that those laborers were, in fact, the bulk of the company; and that he, the major, only furnished the land, the seed, and the implements. 'That man who was driving the long roller, and with whom you were indignant because he would n't get out of our way, is the president of the company."

"That need n't make him so uncivil," said Rose pertingly, "for if it comes to that you 're the *landlord*," she added triumphantly.

"No," said the major good humoredly. "I am simply the man driving the lighter and more easily managed team for pleasure, and he 's the man driving the heavier and more difficult machine for work. It 's for me to get out of his way; and looked at in the light of my being *the landlord*, it is still worse, for as we 're working 'on shares' I 'm interrupting *his* work, and reducing *his* profits merely because I choose to sacrifice my own."

I need not say that those atrociously leveling sentiments were received by the young ladies with that feminine scorn which is only qualified by misconception. Rose, who, under the influence of her hostess, had a vague impression that they sounded something like the French Revolution, and that Adèle must feel like the Princess Elizabeth, rushed to her relief like a good girl. "But, major, now, *you 're* a gentleman, and if *you* had been driving that roller, you know you would have turned out for us."

"I don't know about that," said the major mischievously; "but if I had, I should have known that the other fellow who accepted it was n't a gentleman."

But Rose, having sufficiently shown her partisanship in the discussion, after the feminine fashion, did not care particularly for the logical result. After a moment's silence she resumed, "And the wheat ranch below — is that carried on in the same way?"

"Yes. But their landlord is a bank, who advances not only the land, but the money to work it, and does n't ride around in a buggy with a couple of charmingly distracting young ladies."

"And do they all share alike?" continued Rose, ignoring the pleasantry, "big and little — that young inventor with the rest?"

She stopped. She felt the *ingénue's* usually complacent eyes suddenly fixed upon her with an unhallowed precocity, and as quickly withdrawn. Without knowing why, she felt embarrassed, and changed the subject.

The next day they drove to the Convent of Santa Clara and the Mission College of San José. Their welcome at both places seemed to Rose to be a mingling of caste greeting and spiritual zeal, and the austere seclusion and reserve of those cloisters repeated that suggestion of an Old World civilization that had already fascinated the young Western girl. They made other excusions in the vicinity, but did not extend it to a visit to their few neighbors. With their reserved and exclusive ideas this fact did not strike Rose as peculiar; but on a later shopping expedition to the town of San José, a certain reticence and aggressive sensitiveness on the part of the shopkeepers and tradespeople towards the Randolphs produced an unpleasant impression on her mind. She could not help noticing, too, that, after the first stare of astonishment which greeted her appearance with her hostess, she herself was included in the antagonism. With her youthful prepossession for her friends, this distinction she regarded as flattering and aristocratic, and I fear she accented it still more by discussing with Mrs. Randolph the merits of the shopkeepers' wares in schoolgirl French before them. She was unfortunate enough, however, to do this in the shop of a polyglot German.

"Oxcoos me, mees," he said gravely, — "but dot lady speeks Engeleesh so goot mit yourselluf, and ven you dells to her dot silk is hallf gotton in English, she onderstand you mooch better, and it don't make nodings to me." The laugh which would have followed from her own countrywomen did not, however, break upon the trained faces of the "de Fontanges l'Hommadieus," yet while Rose would have joined in it, albeit a little ruefully, she felt for the first time mortified at their civil insincerity.

At the end of two weeks, Major Randolph received a letter from Mr. Mallory. When he had read it, he turned to his wife: "He thanks you," he said, "for your kindness to his daughter, and explains that his sudden departure was owing to the necessity of his taking advantage of a great opportunity for speculation that had offered." As Mrs. Randolph turned away with a slight shrug of the shoulders, the major continued: "But you have n't heard all! That opportunity was the securing of a half interest in a cinnabar lode in Sonora, which has already gone up a hundred thousand dollars in his hands! By Jove! a man can afford to drop a little social ceremony on those terms — eh, Josephine?" he concluded, with a triumphant chuckle.

"He 's as likely to lose his hundred thousand to-morrow, while his manners will remain," said Mrs. Randolph. "I 've no faith in these sudden California fortunes!"

"You 're wrong as regards Mallory, for he 's as careful as he is lucky. He don't throw money away for appearance' sake, or he 'd have a rich home for that daughter. He could afford it."

Mrs. Randolph was silent. "She is his only daughter, I believe," she continued presently.

"Yes — he has no other kith or kin," returned the major.

"She seems to be very much impressed by Emile," said Mrs. Randolph.

Major Randolph faced his wife quickly.

"In the name of all that 's ridiculous, my dear, you are not already thinking of" — he gasped.

"I should be very loath to give *my* sanction to anything of the kind, knowing the difference of her birth, education, and religion, — although the latter I believe she would readily change," said Mrs. Randolph severely. "But when you speak of *my* already thinking of 'such things,'

do you suppose that your friend, Mr. Mallory, did n't consider all that when he sent that girl here?"

"Never," said the major vehemently; "and if it entered his head now, by Jove, he 'd take her away to-morrow — always supposing I did n't anticipate him by sending her off myself."

Mrs. Randolph uttered her mirthless laugh. "And you suppose the girl would go? Really, major, you don't seem to understand this boasted liberty of your own countrywoman. What does she care for her father's control? Why, she 'd make him do just what *she* wanted. But," she added, with an expression of dignity, "perhaps we had better not discuss this until we know something of Emile's feelings in the matter. That is the only question that concerns us." With this she swept out of the room, leaving the major at first speechless with honest indignation, and then, after the fashion of all guileless natures, a little uneasy and suspicious of his own guilelessness. For a day or two after, he found himself, not without a sensation of meanness, watching Rose when in Emile's presence, but he could distinguish nothing more than the frank satisfaction she showed equally to the others. Yet he found himself regretting even that, so subtle was the contagion of his wife's suspicions.

CHAPTER III

It had been a warm morning; an unusual mist, which the sun had not dissipated, had crept on from the great grain-fields beyond, and hung around the house charged with a dry, dusty closeness that seemed to be quite independent of the sun's rays, and more like a heated exhalation or emanation of the soil itself. In its acrid irritation Rose thought she could detect the breath of the wheat as on the day she had plunged into its pale, green shadows. By the afternoon this mist had disappeared, apparently in the same mysterious manner, but not scattered by the usual trade-wind, which — another unusual circumstance — that day was not forthcoming. There was a breathlessness in the air like the hush of listening expectancy, which filled the young girl with a vague restlessness, and seemed to even affect a scattered company of crows in the field beyond the house, which rose suddenly with startled but aimless wings, and then dropped vacantly among the grain again.

Major Randolph was inspecting a distant part of the ranch, Mrs. Randolph was presumably engaged in her boudoir, and Rose was sitting between Adèle and Emile before the piano in the drawing-room, listlessly turning over the leaves of some music. There had been an odd mingling of eagerness and abstraction in the usual attentions of the young man that morning, and a certain nervous affectation in his manner of twisting the ends of a small black mustache, which resembled his mother's eyebrows, that had affected Rose with a half-amused, half-uneasy conscious-

ness, but which she had, however, referred to the restlessness produced by the weather. It occurred to her also that the vacuously amiable Adèle had once or twice regarded her with the same precocious, childlike curiosity and infantine cunning she had once before exhibited. All this did not, however, abate her admiration for both — perhaps particularly for this picturesquely gentlemanly young fellow, with his gentle audacities of compliment, his caressing attentions, and his unfailing and equal address. And when, discovering that she had mislaid her fan for the fifth time that morning, he started up with equal and undiminished fire to go again and fetch it, the look of grateful pleasure and pleading perplexity in her pretty eyes might have turned a less conceited brain than his.

"But you don't know where it is!"

"I shall find it by instinct."

"You are spoiling me — you two." The parenthesis was a hesitating addition; but she continued, with fresh sincerity, "I shall be quite helpless when I leave here — if I am ever able to go by myself."

"Don't ever go, then."

"But just now I want my fan; it is so close everywhere to-day."

"I fly, mademoiselle."

He started to the door.

She called after him: —

"Let me help your instinct, then; I had it last in the major's study."

"That was where I was going."

He disappeared. Rose got up and moved uneasily towards the window. "How queer and quiet it looks outside. It 's really too bad that he should be sent after that fan again. He 'll never find it." She resumed her place at the piano, Adèle following her with round, expectant eyes. After a pause she started up again. "I 'll go and

fetch it myself," she said, with a half-embarrassed laugh, and ran to the door.

Scarcely understanding her own nervousness, but finding relief in rapid movement, Rose flew lightly up the staircase. The major's study, where she had been writing letters during his absence, that morning, was at the further end of a long passage, and near her own bedroom, the door of which, as she passed, she noticed, half abstractedly, was open; but she continued on and hurriedly entered the study. At the same moment Emile, with a smile on his face, turned towards her with the fan in his hand.

"Oh, you 've found it," she said, with nervous eagerness. "I was so afraid you 'd have all your trouble for nothing."

She extended her hand, with a half-breathless smile, for the fan, but he caught her outstretched little palm in his own, and held it.

"Ah! but you are not going to leave us, are you?"

In a flash of consciousness she understood him, and, as it seemed to her, her own nervousness, and all, and everything. And with it came a swift appreciation of all it meant to her and her future. To be always with him and like him, a part of this refined and restful seclusion — akin to all that had so attracted her in this house; not to be obliged to educate herself up to it, but to be in it on equal terms at once; to know that it was no wild, foolish youthful fancy, but a wise, thoughtful, and prudent resolve, that her father would understand and her friends respect: these were the thoughts that crowded quickly upon her, more like an explanation of her feelings than a revelation, in the brief second that he held her hand. It was not, perhaps, love as she had dreamed it, and even *believed* it, before. She was not ashamed or embarrassed; she even felt, with a slight pride, that she was not blushing. She raised her eyes frankly. What she *would* have said she did not

know, for the door, which he had closed behind her, began to shake violently.

It was not the fear of some angry intrusion or interference surely that made him drop her hand instantly. It was not — her second thought — the idea that some one had fallen in a fit against it that blanched his face with abject and unreasoning terror! It must have been something else that caused him to utter an inarticulate cry and dash out of the room and down the stairs like a madman! What had happened?

In her own self-possession she knew that all this was passing rapidly, that it was not the door now that was still shaking, for it had swung almost shut again — but it was the windows, the book-shelves, the floor beneath her feet, that were all shaking. She heard a hurried scrambling, the trampling of feet below, and the quick rustling of a skirt in the passage, as if some one had precipitately fled from her room. Yet no one had called to her — even *he* had said nothing. Whatever had happened they clearly had not cared for her to know.

The jarring and rattling ceased as suddenly, but the house seemed silent and empty. She moved to the door, which had now swung open a few inches; but to her astonishment it was fixed in that position, and she could not pass. As yet she had been free from any personal fear, and even now it was with a half smile at her imprisonment in the major's study that she rang the bell and turned to the window. A man, whom she recognized as one of the ranch laborers, was standing a hundred feet away in the garden, looking curiously at the house. He saw her face as she tried to raise the sash, uttered an exclamation, and ran forward. But before she could understand what he said, the sash began to rattle in her hand, the jarring recommenced, the floor shook beneath her feet, a hideous sound of grinding seemed to come from the walls, a thin

seam of dustlike smoke broke from the ceiling, and with the noise of falling plaster a dozen books followed each other from the shelves, in what, in the frantic hurry of that moment, seemed a grimly deliberate succession; a picture hanging against the wall, to her dazed wonder, swung forward, and appeared to stand at right angles from it; she felt herself reeling against the furniture; a deadly nausea overtook her; as she glanced despairingly towards the window, the outlying fields beyond the garden seemed to be undulating like a sea. For the first time she raised her voice, not in fear, but in a pathetic little cry of apology for her awkwardness in tumbling about and not being able to grapple this new experience, and then she found herself near the door, which had once more swung free. She grasped it eagerly, and darted out of the study into the deserted passage. Here some instinct made her follow the line of the wall, rather than the shaking balusters of the corridor and staircase; but before she reached the bottom she heard a shout, and the farm-laborer she had seen coming towards her seized her by the arm, dragged her to the open doorway of the drawing-room, and halted beneath its arch in the wall. Another thrill, but lighter than before, passed through the building, then all was still again.

"It 's over; I reckon that 's all just now," said the man coolly. "It 's quite safe to cut and run for the garden now, through this window." He half led, half lifted her through the French window to the veranda and the ground, and locking her arm in his, ran quickly forward a hundred feet from the house, stopping at last beneath a large post oak where there was a rustic seat, into which she sank. "You 're safe now, I reckon," he said grimly.

She looked towards the house; the sun was shining brightly; a cool breeze seemed to have sprung up as they ran. She could see a quantity of rubbish lying on the roof, from which a dozen yards of zinc gutter were perilously

hanging; the broken shafts of the further cluster of chimneys, a pile of bricks scattered upon the ground and among the battered-down beams of the end of the veranda — but that was all. She lifted her now whitened face to the man, and with the apologetic smile still lingering on her lips, asked: —

"What does it all mean? What has happened?"

The man stared at her. "D' ye mean to say ye don't know?"

"How could I? They must have all left the house as soon as it began. I was talking to — to M. l'Hommadieu, and he suddenly left."

The man brought his face angrily down within an inch of her own. "D' ye mean to say that them d—d French half-breeds stampeded and left yer there alone?"

She was still too much stupefied by the reaction to fully comprehend his meaning, and repeated feebly, with her smile still faintly lingering, "But you don't tell me *what* it was?"

"An earthquake," said the man roughly; "and if it had lasted ten seconds longer it would have shook the whole shanty down and left you under it. Yer kin tell *that* to them, if they don't know it; but from the way they made tracks to the fields, I reckon they did. They 're coming now."

Without another word he turned away half surlily, half defiantly, passing scarce fifty yards away Mrs. Randolph and her daughter, who were hastening towards their guest.

"Oh, here you are!" said Mrs. Randolph, with the nearest approach to effusion that Rose had yet seen in her manner. "We were wondering where you had run to, and were getting quite concerned. Emile was looking for you everywhere."

The recollection of his blank and abject face, his vague outcry and blind fright, came back to Rose with a shock

that sent a flash of sympathetic shame to her face. The ingenious Adèle noticed it, and dutifully pinched her mother's arm.

"Emile?" echoed Rose faintly — "looking for *me?*"

Mother and daughter exchanged glances.

"Yes," said Mrs. Randolph cheerfully, "he says he started to run with you, but you got ahead and slipped out of the garden door — or something of the kind," she added, with the air of making light of Rose's girlish fears. "You know one scarcely knows what one does at such times, and it must have been frightfully strange to *you* — and he 's been quite distracted, lest you should have wandered away. Adèle, run and tell him Miss Mallory has been here under the oak all the time."

Rose started — and then fell hopelessly back in her seat. Perhaps it *was* true! Perhaps he had not rushed off with that awful face and without a word. Perhaps she herself had been half frightened out of her reason. In the simple, weak kindness of her nature it seemed less dreadful to believe that the fault was partly her own.

"And you went back into the house to look for us when all was over," said Mrs. Randolph, fixing her black, beady magnetic eyes on Rose, "and that stupid yokel Zake brought you out again. He need n't have clutched your arm so closely, my dear, — I must speak to the major about his excessive familiarity, — but I suppose I shall be told that that is American freedom. I call it 'a liberty.'"

It struck Rose that she had not even thanked the man — in the same flash that she remembered something dreadful that he had said. She covered her face with her hands and tried to recall herself.

Mrs. Randolph gently tapped her shoulder with a mixture of maternal philosophy and discipline, and continued: "Of course, it 's an upset — and you 're confused still. That 's nothing. They say, dear, it 's perfectly well known

that no two people's recollections of these things ever are the same. It 's really ridiculous the contradictory stories one hears. Is n't it, Emile?"

Rose felt that the young man had joined them and was looking at her. In the fear that she should still see some trace of the startled, selfish animal in his face, she did not dare to raise her eyes to his, but looked at his mother. Mrs. Randolph was standing then, collected but impatient.

"It 's all over now," said Emile in his usual voice, "and except the chimneys and some fallen plaster there 's really no damage done. But I 'm afraid they have caught it pretty badly at the Mission, and at San Francisco in those tall, flashy, rattletrap buildings they 're putting up. I 've just sent off one of the men for news."

Her father was in San Francisco by that time; and she had never thought of *him!* In her quick remorse she now forgot all else and rose to her feet.

"I must telegraph to my father at once," she said hurriedly; "he is there."

"You had better wait until the messenger returns and hear his news," said Emile. "If the shock was only a slight one in San Francisco, your father might not understand you, and would be alarmed."

She could see his face now — there was no record of the past expression upon it, but he was watching her eagerly. Mrs. Randolph and Adèle had moved away to speak to the servants. Emile drew nearer.

"You surely will not desert us now?" he said in a low voice.

"Please don't," she said vaguely. "I 'm so worried," and pushing quickly past him, she hurriedly rejoined the two women.

They were superintending the erection of a long tent or marquee in the garden, hastily extemporized from the awnings of the veranda and other cloth. Mrs. Randolph

explained that, although all danger was over, there was the possibility of the recurrence of lighter shocks during the day and night, and that they would all feel much more secure and comfortable to camp out for the next twenty-four hours in the open air.

"Only imagine you 're picnicking, and you 'll enjoy it as most people usually enjoy those horrid *al-fresco* entertainments. I don't believe there 's the slightest real necessity for it, but," she added in a lower voice, "the Irish and Chinese servants are so demoralized now, they would n't stay indoors with us. It 's a common practice here, I believe, for a day or two after the shock, and it gives time to put things right again and clear up. The old, one-storied, Spanish houses, with walls three feet thick, and built round a courtyard or patio, were much safer. It 's only when the Americans try to improve upon the old order of things with their pinchbeck shams and stucco that Providence interferes like this to punish them."

It was the fact, however, that Rose was more impressed by what seemed to her the absolute indifference of Providence in the matter, and the cool resumption by Nature of her ordinary conditions. The sky above their heads was as rigidly blue as ever, and as smilingly monotonous; the distant prospect, with its clear, well-known silhouettes, had not changed; the crows swung on lazy, deliberate wings over the grain as before; and the trade-wind was again blowing in its quiet persistency. And yet she knew that something had happened that would never again make her enjoyment of the prospect the same — that nothing would ever be as it was yesterday. I think at first she referred only to the material and larger phenomena, and did not confound this revelation of the insecurity of the universe with her experience of man. Yet the fact also remained that to the conservative, correct, and, as she believed, secure condition to which she had been approximating, all

her relations were rudely shaken and upset. It really seemed to this simple-minded young woman that the revolutionary disturbance of settled conditions might have as providential an origin as the "Divine Right" of which she had heard so much.

CHAPTER IV

In her desire to be alone and to evade the now significant attentions of Emile, she took advantage of the bustle that followed the hurried transfer of furniture and articles from the house to escape through the garden to the outlying fields. Striking into one of the dusty lanes that she remembered, she wandered on for half an hour until her progress and meditation were suddenly arrested. She had come upon a long chasm or crack in the soil, full twenty feet wide and as many in depth, crossing her path at right angles. She did not remember having seen it before; the track of wheels went up to its precipitous edge; she could see the track on the other side, but the hiatus remained, unbridged and uncovered. It was not there yesterday. She glanced right and left; the fissure seemed to extend, like a moat or ditch, from the distant road to the upland between her and the great wheat valley below, from which she was shut off. An odd sense of being in some way a prisoner confronted her. She drew back with an impatient start, and perhaps her first real sense of indignation. A voice behind her, which she at once recognized, scarcely restored her calmness.

"You can't get across there, miss."

She turned. It was the young inventor from the wheat ranch, on horseback and with a clean face. He had just ridden out of the grain on the same side of the chasm as herself.

"But you seem to have got over," she said bluntly.

"Yes, but it was further up the field. I reckoned that

the split might be deeper but not so broad in the rock outcrop over there than in the adobe here. I found it so and jumped it."

He looked as if he might — alert, intelligent, and self-contained. He lingered a moment, and then continued: —

"I 'm afraid you must have been badly shaken and a little frightened up there before the chimneys came down?"

"No," she was glad to say briefly, and she believed truthfully, "I was n't frightened. I did n't even know it was an earthquake."

"Ah!" he reflected, "that was because you were a stranger. It 's odd — they 're all like that. I suppose it 's because nobody really expects or believes in the unlooked-for thing, and yet that 's the thing that always happens. And then, of course, that other affair, which really is serious, startled you the more."

She felt herself ridiculously and angrily blushing. "I don't know what you mean," she said icily. "What other affair?"

"Why, the well."

"The well?" she repeated vacantly.

"Yes; the artesian well has stopped. Did n't the major tell you?"

"No," said the girl. "He was away; I have n't seen him yet."

"Well, the flow of water has ceased completely. That 's what I 'm here for. The major sent for me, and I 've been to examine it."

"And is that stoppage so very important?" she said dubiously.

It was his turn to look at her wonderingly.

"If it 's *lost* entirely, it means ruin for the ranch," he said sharply. He wheeled his horse, nodded gravely, and trotted off.

Major Randolph's figure of the "life-blood of the ranch"

flashed across her suddenly. She knew nothing of irrigation or the costly appliances by which the Californian agriculturist opposed the long summer droughts. She only vaguely guessed that the dreadful earthquake had struck at the prosperity of those people whom only a few hours ago she had been proud to call her friends. The underlying goodness of her nature was touched. Should she let a momentary fault — if it were not really, after all, only a misunderstanding — rise between her and them at such a moment? She turned and hurried quickly towards the house.

Hastening onward, she found time, however, to wonder also why these common men — she now included even the young inventor in that category — were all so rude and uncivil to *her!* She had never before been treated in this way; she had always been rather embarrassed by the admiring attentions of young men (clerks and collegians) in her Atlantic home, and of professional men (merchants and stockbrokers) in San Francisco. It was true that they were not as continually devoted to her and to the nice art and etiquette of pleasing as Emile, — they had other things to think about, being in business and not being *gentlemen*, — but then they were greatly superior to these clowns, who took no notice of her, and rode off without lingering or formal leave-taking when their selfish affairs were concluded. It must be the contact of the vulgar earth — this wretched, cracking material, and yet ungovernable and lawless earth — that so depraved them. She felt she would like to say this to some one — not her father, for he would n't listen to her, nor to the major, who would laughingly argue with her, but to Mrs. Randolph, who would understand her, and perhaps say it some day in her own sharp, sneering way to these very clowns. With those gentle sentiments irradiating her blue eyes, and putting a pink flush upon her fair cheeks, Rose reached the garden with

the intention of rushing sympathetically into Mrs. Randolph's arms. But it suddenly occurred to her that she would be obliged to state how she became aware of this misfortune, and with it came an instinctive aversion to speak of her meeting with the inventor. She would wait until Mrs. Randolph told her. But although that lady was engaged in a low-voiced discussion in French with Emile and Adèle, which instantly ceased at her approach, there was no allusion made to the new calamity. "You need not telegraph to your father," she said as Rose approached; "he has already telegraphed to you for news; as you were out, and the messenger was waiting an answer, we opened the dispatch, and sent one, telling him that you were all right, and that he need not hurry here on your account. So you are satisfied, I hope." A few hours ago this would have been true, and Rose would have probably seen in the action of her hostess only a flattering motherly supervision; there was, in fact, still a lingering trace of trust in her mind; yet she was conscious that she would have preferred to answer the dispatch herself, and to have let her father come. To a girl brought up with a belief in the right of individual independence of thought and action, there was something in Mrs. Randolph's practical ignoring of that right which startled her in spite of her new conservatism, while, as the daughter of a business man, her instincts revolted against Mrs. Randolph's unbusinesslike action with the telegram, however vulgar and unrefined she may have begun to consider a life of business. The result was a certain constraint and embarrassment in her manner, which, however, had the laudable effect of limiting Emile's attention to significant glances, and was no doubt variously interpreted by the others. But she satisfied her conscience by determining to make a confidence of her sympathy to the major on the first opportunity.

This she presently found when the others were preoccupied; the major greeting her with a somewhat careworn face, but a voice whose habitual kindness was unchanged. When he had condoled with her on the terrifying phenomenon that had marred her visit to the ranch, — and she could not help impatiently noticing that he, too, seemed to have accepted his wife's theory that she had been half deliriously frightened, — he regretted that her father had not concluded to come down to the ranch, as his practical advice would have been invaluable in this emergency. She was about to eagerly explain why, when it occurred to her that Mrs. Randolph had only given him a suppressed version of the telegram, and that she would be betraying her, or again taking sides in this partisan divided home. With some hesitation she at last alluded to the accident to the artesian well. The major did not ask her how she had heard of it; it was a bad business, he thought, but it might not be a total loss. The water may have been only diverted by the shock and might be found again at the lower level, or in some lateral fissure. He had sent hurriedly for Tom Bent — that clever young engineer at the wheat ranch, who was always studying up these things with his inventions — and that was his opinion. No, Tom was not a well-digger, but it was generally known that he had "located" one or two, and had long ago advised the tapping of that flow by a second boring, in case of just such an emergency. He was coming again to-morrow. By the way, he had asked how the young lady visitor was, and hoped she had not been alarmed by the earthquake!

Rose felt herself again blushing, and, what was more singular, with an unexpected and it seemed to her ridiculous pleasure, although outwardly she appeared to ignore the civility completely. And she had no intention of being so easily placated. If this young man thought by mere perfunctory civilities to her *host* to make up for his clown-

ishness to *her*, he was mistaken. She would let him see it when he called to-morrow. She quickly turned the subject by assuring the major of her sympathy and her intention of sending for her father. For the rest of the afternoon and during their *al-fresco* dinner she solved the difficulty of her strained relations with Mrs. Randolph and Emile by conversing chiefly with the major, tacitly avoiding, however, any allusion to this Mr. Bent. But Mrs. Randolph was less careful.

"You don't really mean to say, major," she began in her driest, grittiest manner, "that instead of sending to San Francisco for some skilled master mechanic, you are going to listen to the vagaries of a conceited, half-educated farm-laborer, and employ him? You might as well call in some of those wizards or water-witches at once." But the major, like many other well-managed husbands who are good humoredly content to suffer in the sunshine of prosperity, had no idea of doing so in adversity, and the prospect of being obliged to go back to youthful struggles had recalled some of the independence of that period. He looked up quietly, and said: —

"If his conclusions are as clear and satisfactory to-morrow as they were to-day, I shall certainly try to secure his services."

"Then I can only say *I* would prefer the water-witch. He at least would not represent a class of neighbors who have made themselves systematically uncivil and disagreeable to us."

"I am afraid, Josephine, we have not tried to make ourselves particularly agreeable to *them*," said the major.

"If that can only be done by admitting their equality, I prefer they should remain uncivil. Only let it be understood, major, that if you choose to take this Tom-the-ploughboy to mend your well, you will at least keep him there while he is on the property."

With what retort the major would have kept up this conjugal discussion, already beginning to be awkward to the discreet visitor, is not known, as it was suddenly stopped by a bullet from the rosebud lips of the ingenuous Adèle.

"Why, he 's very handsome when his face is clean, and his hands are small and not at all hard. And he does n't talk the least bit queer or common."

There was a dead silence. "And pray where did *you* see him, and what do you know about his hands?" asked Mrs. Randolph in her most desiccated voice. "Or has the major already presented you to him? I should n't be surprised."

"No, but" — hesitated the young girl, with a certain mouse-like audacity, — "when you sent me to look after Miss Mallory, I came up to him just after he had spoken to her, and he stopped to ask me how we all were, and if Miss Mallory was really frightened by the earthquake, and he shook hands for good-afternoon — that 's all."

"And who taught you to converse with common strangers and shake hands with them?" continued Mrs. Randolph, with narrowing lips.

"Nobody, mamma; but I thought if Miss Mallory, who is a young lady, could speak to him, so could I, who am not out yet."

"We won't discuss this any further at present," said Mrs. Randolph stiffly, as the major smiled grimly at Rose. "The earthquake seems to have shaken down in this house more than the chimneys."

It certainly had shaken all power of sleep from the eyes of Rose when the household at last dispersed to lie down in their clothes on the mattresses which had been arranged under the awnings. She was continually starting up from confused dreams of the ground shaking under her, or she seemed to be standing on the brink of some dreadful abyss

like the great chasm on the grain-field, when it began to tremble and crumble beneath her feet. It was near morning when, unable to endure it any longer, she managed, without disturbing the sleeping Adèle, who occupied the same curtained recess with her, to slip out from the awning. Wrapped in a thick shawl, she made her way through the encompassing trees and bushes of the garden that had seemed to imprison and suffocate her, to the edge of the grain-field, where she could breathe the fresh air beneath an open, starlit sky. There was no moon and the darkness favored her; she had no fears that weighed against the horror of seclusion with her own fancies. Besides, they were camping *out* of the house, and if she chose to sit up or walk about, no one could think it strange. She wished her father were here that she might have some one of her own kin to talk to, yet she knew not what to say to him if he had come. She wanted somebody to sympathize with her feelings, — or rather, perhaps, some one to combat and even ridicule the uneasiness that had lately come over her. She knew what her father would say, — "Do you want to go, or do you want to stay here? Do you like these people, or do you not?" She remembered the one or two glowing and enthusiastic accounts she had written him of her visit here, and felt herself blushing again. What would he think of Mrs. Randolph's opening and answering the telegram? Would n't he find out from the major if she had garbled the sense of his dispatch?

Away to the right, in the midst of the distant and invisible wheat-field, there was the same intermittent star, which like a living, breathing thing seemed to dilate in glowing respiration, as she had seen it the first night of her visit. Mr. Bent's forge! It must be nearly daylight now; the poor fellow had been up all night, or else was stealing this early march on the day. She recalled Adèle's sudden eulogium of him. The first natural smile that had

come to her lips since the earthquake broke up her nervous restraint, and sent her back more like her old self to her couch.

But she had not proceeded far towards the tent, when she heard the sound of low voices approaching her. It was the major and his wife, who, like herself, had evidently been unable to sleep, and were up betimes. A new instinct of secretiveness, which she felt was partly the effect of her artificial surrounding, checked her first natural instinct to call to them, and she drew back deeper in the shadow to let them pass. But to her great discomfiture the major, in a conversational emphasis, stopped directly in front of her.

"You are wrong, I tell you, a thousand times wrong. The girl is simply upset by this earthquake. It 's a great pity her father did n't come instead of telegraphing. And by Jove, rather than hear any more of this, I 'll send for him myself," said the major in an energetic but suppressed voice.

"And the girl won't thank you, and you 'll be a fool for your pains," returned Mrs. Randolph, with dry persistency.

"But according to your own ideas of propriety, Mallory ought to be the first one to be consulted — and by me, too."

"Not in this case. Of course, before any actual engagement is on, you can speak of Emile's attentions."

"But suppose Mallory has other views. Suppose he declines the honor. The man is no fool."

"Thank you. But for that very reason he must. Listen to me, major; if he does n't care to please his daughter for her own sake, he will have to do so for the sake of decency. Yes, I tell you, she has thoroughly compromised herself — quite enough, if it is ever known, to spoil any other engagement her father may make. Why, ask Adèle!

The day of the earthquake she *absolutely* had the audacity to send him out of the room upstairs into your study for her fan, and then follow him up there alone. The servants knew it. I knew it, for I was in her room at the time with Father Antonio. The earthquake made it plain to everybody. Decline it! No. Mr. Mallory will think twice about it before he does that. What 's that? Who 's there?"

There was a sudden rustle in the bushes like the passage of some frightened animal — and then all was still again.

CHAPTER V

THE sun, an hour high, but only just topping the greenish crests of the wheat, was streaming like the morning breeze through the open length of Tom Bent's workshed. An exaggerated and prolonged shadow of the young inventor himself at work beside his bench was stretching itself far into the broken-down ranks of stalks towards the invisible road, and falling at the very feet of Rose Mallory as she emerged from them.

She was very pale, very quiet, and very determined. The traveling mantle thrown over her shoulders was dusty, the ribbons that tied her hat under her round chin had become unloosed. She advanced, walking down the line of shadow directly towards him.

"I am afraid I will have to trouble you once more," she said, with a faint smile, which did not, however, reach her perplexed eyes. "Could you give me any kind of a conveyance that would take me to San José at once?"

The young man had started at the rustling of her dress in the shavings, and turned eagerly. The faintest indication of a loss of interest was visible for an instant in his face, but it quickly passed into a smile of recognition. Yet she felt that he had neither noticed any change in her appearance, nor experienced any wonder at seeing her there at that hour.

"I did not take a buggy from the house," she went on quickly, "for I left early, and did not want to disturb them. In fact, they don't know that I am gone. I was worried at not hearing news from my father in San Fran-

cisco since the earthquake, and I thought I would run down to San José to inquire without putting them to any trouble. Anything will do that you have ready, if I can take it at once."

Still without exhibiting the least surprise, Bent nodded affirmatively, put down his tools, begged her to wait a moment, and ran off in the direction of the cabin. As he disappeared behind the wheat, she lapsed quite suddenly against the workbench, but recovered herself a moment later, leaning with her back against it, her hands grasping it on either side, and her knit brows and determined little face turned towards the road. Then she stood erect again, shook the dust out of her skirts, lifted her veil, wiped her cheeks and brow with the corner of a small handkerchief, and began walking up and down the length of the shed as Bent reappeared.

He was accompanied by the man who had first led her through the wheat. He gazed upon her with apparently all the curiosity and concern that the other had lacked.

"You want to get to San José as quick as you can?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes," she said quickly, "if you can help me."

"You walked all the way from the major's here?" he continued, without taking his eyes from her face.

"Yes," she answered, with an affectation of carelessness she had not shown to Bent. "But I started very early, it was cool and pleasant, and did n't seem far."

"I 'll put you down in San José inside the hour. You shall have my horse and trotting sulky, and I 'll drive you myself. Will that do?"

She looked at him wonderingly. She had not forgotten his previous restraint and gravity, but now his face seemed to have relaxed with some humorous satisfaction. She felt herself coloring slightly, but whether with shame or relief she could not tell.

"I shall be *so* much obliged to you," she replied hesitatingly, "and so will my father, I know."

"I reckon," said the man, with the same look of amused conjecture; then, with a quick, assuring nod, he turned away, and dived into the wheat again.

"You 're all right now, Miss Mallory," said Bent complacently. "Dawson will fix it. He 's got a good horse, and he 's a good driver, too." He paused, and then added pleasantly, "I suppose they 're all well up at the house?"

It was so evident that his remark carried no personal meaning to herself that she was obliged to answer carelessly, "Oh, yes."

"I suppose you see a good deal of Miss Randolph — Miss Adèle, I think you call her?" he remarked tentatively, and with a certain boyish enthusiasm, which she had never conceived possible to his nature.

"Yes," she replied a little dryly, "she is the only young lady there." She stopped, remembering Adèle's naïve description of the man before her, and said abruptly, "You know her, then?"

"A little," replied the young man modestly. "I see her pretty often when I am passing the upper end of the ranch. She 's very well brought up, and her manners are very refined — don't you think so? — and yet she 's just as simple and natural as a country girl. There 's a great deal in education after all, is n't there?" he went on confidentially, "and although" — he lowered his voice and looked cautiously around him — "I believe that some of us here don't fancy her mother much, there 's no doubt that Mrs. Randolph knows how to bring up her children. Some people think that kind of education is all artificial, and don't believe in it, but *I* do!"

With the consciousness that she was running away from these people and the shameful disclosure she had heard last night — with the recollection of Adèle's scandalous interpre-

tation of her most innocent actions and her sudden and complete revulsion against all that she had previously admired in that household, to hear this man, who had seemed to her a living protest against their ideas and principles, now expressing them and holding them up for emulation, almost took her breath away.

"I suppose that means you intend to fix Major Randolph's well for him?" she said dryly.

"Yes," he returned, without noticing her manner; "and I think I can find that water again. I 've been studying it up all night, and do you know what I 'm going to do? I am going to make the earthquake that lost it help me to find it again." He paused, and looked at her with a smile and a return of his former enthusiasm. "Do you remember the crack in the adobe field that stopped you yesterday?"

"Yes," said the girl, with a slight shiver.

"I told you then that the same crack was a split in the rock outcrop further up the plain, and was deeper. I am satisfied now, from what I have seen, that it is really a rupture of the whole strata all the way down. That 's the one weak point that the imprisoned water is sure to find, and that 's where the borer will tap it — in the new well that the earthquake itself has sunk."

It seemed to her now that she understood his explanation perfectly, and she wondered the more that he had been so mistaken in his estimate of Adèle. She turned away a little impatiently, and looked anxiously towards the point where Dawson had disappeared. Bent followed her eyes.

"He 'll be here in a moment, Miss Mallory. He has to drive slowly through the grain, but I hear the wheels." He stopped, and his voice took up its previous note of boyish hesitation. "By the way — I 'll — I 'll be going up to the Rancho this afternoon to see the major. Have you any message for Mrs. Randolph — or for — for Miss Adèle?"

"No" — said Rose hesitatingly, "and — and" —

"I see," interrupted Bent carelessly. "You don't want anything said about your coming here. I won't."

It struck her that he seemed to have no ulterior meaning in the suggestion. But before she could make any reply, Dawson reappeared, driving a handsome mare harnessed to a light, spider-like vehicle. He had also assumed, evidently in great haste, a black frock coat buttoned over his waistcoatless and cravatless shirt, and a tall black hat that already seemed to be cracking in the sunlight. He drove up, at once assisted her to the narrow perch beside him, and with a nod to Bent drove off. His breathless expedition relieved the leave-taking of these young people of any ceremony.

"I suppose," said Mr. Dawson, giving a half glance over his shoulder as they struck into the dusty highway, — "I suppose you don't care to see anybody before you get to San José?"

"No-o-o," said Rose timidly.

"And I reckon you would n't mind my racin' a bit if anybody kem up?"

"No."

"The mare 's sort o' fastidious about takin' anybody's dust."

"Is she?" said Rose, with a faint smile.

"Awful," responded her companion; "and the queerest thing of all is, she can't bear to have any one behind her either."

He leaned forward with his expression of humorous enjoyment of some latent joke and did something with the reins — Rose never could clearly understand what, though it seemed to her that he simply lifted them with ostentatious lightness; but the mare suddenly seemed to *lengthen* herself and lose her height, and the stalks of wheat on either side of the dusty track began to melt into each

other, and then slipped like a flash into one long, continuous, shimmering green hedge. So perfect was the mare's action that the girl was scarcely conscious of any increased effort; so harmonious the whole movement that the light skeleton wagon seemed only a prolonged process of that long, slim body and free, collarless neck, both straight as the thin shafts on each side and straighter than the delicate ribbon-like traces which, in what seemed a mere affectation of conscious power, hung at times almost limp between the whiffletree and the narrow breast-band which was all that confined the animal's powerful fore-quarters. So superb was the reach of its long, easy stride that Rose could scarcely see any undulations in the brown shining back on which she could have placed her foot, nor felt the soft beat of the delicate hoofs that took the dust so firmly and yet so lightly.

The rapidity of motion which kept them both with heads bent forward and seemed to force back any utterance that rose to their lips spared Rose the obligation of conversation, and her companion was equally reticent. But it was evident to her that he half suspected she was running away from the Randolphs, and that she wished to avoid the embarrassment of being overtaken even in persuasive pursuit. It was not possible that he knew the cause of her flight, and yet she could not account for his evident desire to befriend her, nor, above all, for his apparently humorous enjoyment of the situation. Had he taken it gravely, she might have been tempted to partly confide in him and ask his advice. Was she doing right, after all? Ought she not to have stayed long enough to speak her mind to Mrs. Randolph and demand to be sent home? No! She had not only shrunk from repeating the infamous slander she had overheard, but she had a terrible fear that if she had done so, Mrs. Randolph was capable of denying it, or even charging her of being still under the influence of the earth.

quake shock and of walking in her sleep. No! She could not trust her — she could trust no one there. Had not even the major listened to those infamous lies? Had she not seen that he was helpless in the hands of this cabal in his own household? — a cabal that she herself had thoughtlessly joined against him.

They had reached the first slight ascent. Her companion drew out his watch, looked at it with satisfaction, and changed the position of his hands on the reins. Without being able to detect the difference, she felt they were slackening speed. She turned inquiringly towards him; he nodded his head, with a half smile and a gesture to her to look ahead. The spires of San José were already faintly uplifting from the distant fringe of oaks.

So soon! In fifteen minutes she would be there — and *then!* She remembered suddenly she had not yet determined what to do. Should she go on at once to San Francisco, or telegraph to her father and await him at San José? In either case a new fear of the precipitancy of her action and the inadequacy of her reasons had sprung up in her mind. Would her father understand her? Would he underrate the cause and be mortified at the insult she had given the family of his old friend, or, more dreadful still, would he exaggerate her wrongs and seek a personal quarrel with the major. He was a man of quick temper, and had the Western ideas of redress. Perhaps even now she was precipitating a duel between them. Her cheeks grew wan again, her breath came quickly, tears gathered in her eyes. Oh, she was a dreadful girl, she knew it; she was an utterly miserable one, and she knew that too!

The reins were tightened. The pace lessened and at last fell to a walk. Conscious of her telltale eyes and troubled face, she dared not turn to her companion to ask him why, but glanced across the fields.

"When you first came I did n't get to know your name, Miss Mallory, but I reckon I know your father."

Her father! What made him say that? She wanted to speak, but she felt she could not. In another moment, if he went on, she must do *something* — she would cry!

"I reckon you 'll be wanting to go to the hotel first, anyway?"

There! — she knew it! He *would* keep on! And now she had burst into tears.

The mare was still walking slowly; the man was lazily bending forward over the shafts as if nothing had occurred. Then suddenly, illogically, and without a moment's warning, the pride that had sustained her crumbled and became as the dust of the road.

She burst out and told him — this stranger! — this man she had disliked! — all and *everything*. How she had felt, how she had been deceived, and what she had overheard!

"I thought as much," said her companion quietly, "and that 's why I sent for your father."

"You sent for my father! — when? — where?" echoed Rose in astonishment.

"Yesterday. He was to come to-day, and if we don't find him at the hotel it will be because he has already started to come here by the upper and longer road. But you leave it to *me*, and don't you say anything to him of this now. If he 's at the hotel, I 'll say I drove you down there to show off the mare. Sabe? If he is n't, I 'll leave you there and come back here to find him. I 've got something to tell him that will set *you* all right." He smiled grimly, lifted the reins, the mare started forward again, and the vehicle and its occupants disappeared in a vanishing dust cloud.

CHAPTER VI

It was nearly noon when Mr. Dawson finished rubbing down his sweating mare in the little stable shed among the wheat. He had left Rose at the hotel, for they found Mr. Mallory had previously started by a circuitous route for the wheat ranch. He had resumed not only his working clothes, but his working expression. He was now superintending the unloading of a wain of stores and implements when the light carryall of the Randolphs rolled into the field. It contained only Mrs. Randolph and the driver. A slight look of intelligence passed between the latter and the nearest one of Dawson's companions, succeeded, however, by a dull look of stupid vacancy on the faces of all the others, including Dawson. Mrs. Randolph noticed it, and was forewarned. She reflected that no human beings ever looked *naturally* as stupid as that and were able to work. She smiled sarcastically, and then began with dry distinctness and narrowing lips.

"Miss Mallory, a young lady visiting us, went out for an early walk this morning and has not returned. It is possible she may have lost her way among your wheat. Have you seen anything of her?"

Dawson raised his eyes from his work and glanced slowly around at his companions, as if taking the heavy sense of the assembly. One or two shook their heads mechanically, and returned to their suspended labor. He said coolly: —

"Nobody here seems to."

She felt that they were lying. She was only a woman against five men. She was only a petty domestic tyrant;

she might have been a larger one. But she had all the courage of that possibility.

"Major Randolph and my son are away," she went on, drawing herself erect. "But I know that the major will pay liberally if these men will search the field, besides making it all right with your — *employers* — for the loss of time."

Dawson uttered a single word in a low voice to the man nearest him, who apparently communicated it to the others, for the four men stopped unloading, and moved away one after the other — even the driver joining in the exodus. Mrs. Randolph smiled sarcastically; it was plain that these people, with all their boasted independence, were quite amenable to pecuniary considerations. Nevertheless, as Dawson remained looking quietly at her, she said: —

"Then I suppose they 've concluded to go and see?"

"No; I 've sent them away so that they could n't *hear*."

"Hear what?"

"What I 've got to say to you."

She looked at him suddenly. Then she said, with a disdainful glance around her, "I see I am helpless here, and — thanks to your trickery — alone. Have a care, sir; I warn you that you will have to answer to Major Randolph for any insolence."

"I reckon you won't tell Major Randolph what I have to say to you," he returned coolly.

Her lips were nearly a grayish hue, but she said scornfully, "And why not? Do you know whom you are talking to?"

The man came lazily forward to the carryall, carelessly brushed aside the slack reins, and resting his elbows on the horse's back, laid his chin on his hands, as he looked up in the woman's face.

"Yes; *I* know who I 'm talking to," he said coolly.

"But as the major don't, I reckon you won't tell him."

"Stand away from that horse!" she said, her whole face taking the grayish color of her lips, but her black eyes growing smaller and brighter. "Hand me those reins, and let me pass! What *canaille* are you to stop me?"

"I thought so," returned the man, without altering his position; "you don't know *me*. You never saw *me* before. Well, I'm Jim Dawson, the nephew of l'Hommadieu, *your old master!*"

She gripped the iron rail of the seat as if to leap from it, but checked herself suddenly and leaned back, with a set smile on her mouth that seemed stamped there. It was remarkable that with that smile she flung away her old affectation of superciliousness for an older and ruder audacity, and that not only the expression, but the type of her face appeared to have changed.

"I don't say," continued the man quietly, "that he didn't *marry* you before he died. But you know as well as I do that the laws of his State didn't recognize the marriage of a master with his octoroon slave! And you know as well as I do that even if he had freed you, he couldn't change your blood. Why, if I'd been willing to stay at Avoyelles to be a nigger-driver like him, the plantation of 'de Fontanges' — whose name you have taken — would have been left to me. If *you* had stayed there, you might have been my property instead of *your* owning a square man like Randolph. You didn't think of that when you came here, did you?" he said composedly.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she said, dropping rapidly into a different accent, with her white teeth and fixed mirthless smile, "so it is a claim for *property*, eh? You're wanting money — you? *Très bien,* you forget we are in California, where one does not own a slave. And you have a fine story there, my poor friend. Very pretty, but very hard to

prove, *m'sieu*. And these peasants are in it, eh, working it on shares like the farm, eh?"

"Well," said Dawson, slightly changing his position and passing his hand over the horse's neck with a half-wearied contempt, "one of these men is from Plaquemine, and the other from Coupée. They know all the l'Hommadieus' history. And they know a streak of the tar brush when they see it. They took your measure when they came here last year, and sized you up fairly. So had I, for the matter of that, when I *first* saw you. And we compared notes. But the major is a square man, for all he is your husband, and we reckoned he had a big enough contract on his hands to take care of you and l'Hommadieu's half-breeds, and so" — he tossed the reins contemptuously aside — "we kept this to ourselves."

"And now you want — what — eh?"

"We want an end to this foolery," he broke out roughly, stepping back from the vehicle, and facing her suddenly, with his first angry gesture. "We want an end to these airs and grimaces, and all this dandy nigger business; we want an end to this 'cake-walking' through the wheat, and flouting of the honest labor of your betters. We want you and your 'de Fontanges' to climb down. And we want an end to this roping-in of white folks to suit your little game; we want an end to your trying to mix your nigger blood with any one here, and we intend to stop it. We draw the line at the major."

Lashed as she had been by those words apparently out of all semblance of her former social arrogance, a lower and more stubborn resistance seemed to have sprung up in her, as she sat sideways, watching him with her set smile and contracting eyes.

"Ah," she said dryly, "so *she is here*. I thought so. Which of you is it, eh? It 's a good spec — Mallory 's a rich man. She 's not particular."

The man had stopped as if listening, his head turned towards the road. Then he turned carelessly, and facing her again, waved his hand with a gesture of tired dismissal, and said, "Go! You 'll find your driver over there by the tool-shed. He has heard nothing yet — but I 've given you fair warning. Go!"

He walked slowly back towards the shed, as the woman, snatching up the reins, drove violently off in the direction where the men had disappeared. But she turned aside, ignoring her waiting driver in her wild and reckless abandonment of all her old conventional attitudes, and lashing her horse forward with the same set smile on her face, the same odd relaxation of figure, and the same squaring of her elbows.

Avoiding the main road, she pushed into a narrow track that intersected another nearer the scene of the accident to Rose's buggy three weeks before. She had nearly passed it when she was hailed by a strange voice, and looking up, perceived a horseman floundering in the mazes of the wheat to one side of the track. Whatever mean thought of her past life she was flying from, whatever mean purpose she was flying to, she pulled up suddenly, and as suddenly resumed her erect, aggressive stiffness. The stranger was a middle-aged man; in dress and appearance a dweller of cities. He lifted his hat as he perceived the occupant of the wagon to be a lady.

"I beg your pardon, but I fear I 've lost my way in trying to make a short cut to the Excelsior Company's Ranch."

"You are in it now," said Mrs. Randolph quickly.

"Thank you, but where can I find the farmhouse?"

"There is none," she returned, with her old superciliousness, "unless you choose to give that name to the shanties and sheds where the laborers and servants live, near the road."

The stranger looked puzzled. "I 'm looking for a Mr.

Dawson," he said reflectively, "but I may have made some mistake. Do you know Major Randolph's house hereabouts?"

"I do. I am Mrs. Randolph," she said stiffly.

The stranger's brow cleared, and he smiled pleasantly. "Then this is a fortunate meeting," he said, raising his hat again as he reined in his horse beside the wagon, "for I am Mr. Mallory, and I was looking forward to the pleasure of presenting myself to you an hour or two later. The fact is, an old acquaintance, Mr. Dawson, telegraphed me yesterday to meet him here on urgent business, and I felt obliged to go there first."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a sudden gratified intelligence, but her manner seemed rather to increase than abate its grim precision.

"Our meeting this morning, Mr. Mallory, is both fortunate and unfortunate, for I regret to say that your daughter, who has not been quite herself since the earthquake, was missing early this morning and has not yet been found, though we have searched everywhere. Understand me," she said, as the stranger started, "I have no fear for her *personal* safety, I am only concerned for any *indiscretion* that she may commit in the presence of these strangers whose company she would seem to prefer to ours."

"But I don't understand you, madam," said Mallory sternly; "you are speaking of my daughter, and" —

"Excuse me, Mr. Mallory," said Mrs. Randolph, lifting her hand with her driest deprecation and her most desiccating smile, "I 'm not passing judgment or criticism. I am of a foreign race, and consequently do not understand the freedom of American young ladies, and their familiarity with the opposite sex. I make no charges, I only wish to assure you that she will no doubt be found in the company and under the protection of her own countrymen. There is," she added, with ironical distinctness, "a young

mechanic, or field hand, or 'quack well-doctor,' whom she seems to admire, and with whom she appears to be on equal terms."

Mallory regarded her for a moment fixedly, and then his sternness relaxed to a mischievously complacent smile. "That must be young Bent, of whom I've heard," he said, with unabated cheerfulness. "And I don't know but what she may be with him, after all. For now I think of it, a chuckle-headed fellow, of whom a moment ago I inquired the way to your house, told me I'd better ask the young man and young woman who were 'philandering through the wheat' yonder. Suppose we look for them. From what I've heard of Bent he's too much wrapped up in his inventions for flirtation, but it would be a good joke to stumble upon them."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a mingling of gratified malice and undisguised contempt for the fatuous father beside her. But before she could accept or decline the challenge, it had become useless. A murmur of youthful voices struck her ear, and she suddenly stood upright and transfixed in the carriage. For lounging down slowly towards them out of the dim green aisles of the arbored wheat, lost in themselves and the shimmering veil of their seclusion, came the engineer, Thomas Bent, and on his arm, gazing ingenuously into his face, the figure of Adèle, — her own perfect daughter.

"I don't think, my dear," said Mr. Mallory, as the anxious Rose flew into his arms on his return to San José, a few hours later, "that it will be necessary for you to go back again to Major Randolph's before we leave. I have said 'good-by' for you and thanked them, and your trunks are packed and will be sent here. The fact is, my dear, you see this affair of the earthquake and the disaster to the artesian well have upset all their arrangements, and I am

afraid that my little girl would be only in their way just now."

"And you have seen Mr. Dawson — and you know why he sent for you?" asked the young girl, with nervous eagerness.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Mallory thoughtfully, "*that* was really important. You see, my child," he continued, taking her hand in one of his own and patting the back of it gently with the other, "we think, Dawson and I, of taking over the major's ranch and incorporating it with the Excelsior in one, to be worked on shares like the Excelsior; and as Mrs. Randolph is very anxious to return to the Atlantic States with her children, it is quite possible. Mrs. Randolph, as you have possibly noticed," Mr. Mallory went on, still patting his daughter's hand, "does not feel entirely at home here, and will consequently leave the major free to rearrange, by himself, the ranch on the new basis. In fact, as the change must be made before the crops come in, she talks of going next week. But if you like the place, Rose, I've no doubt the major and Dawson will always find room for you and me when we run down there for a little fresh air."

"And did you have all that in your mind, papa, when you came down here, and was that what you and Mr. Dawson wanted to talk about?" said the astonished Rose.

"Mainly, my dear, mainly. You see, I'm a capitalist now, and the real value of capital is to know how and when to apply it to certain conditions."

"And this Mr. — Mr. Bent — do you think — he will go on and find the water, papa?" said Rose hesitatingly.

"Ah! Bent — Tom Bent — oh, yes," said Mallory, with great heartiness. "Capital fellow, Bent! and mighty ingenious! Glad you met him! Well," thoughtfully but still heartily, "he may not find it exactly where he expected, but he'll find it or something better. We can't

part with him, and he has promised Dawson to stay. We 'll utilize *him*, you may be sure."

It would seem that they did; and from certain interviews and conversations that took place between Mr. Bent and Miss Mallory on a later visit, it would also appear that her father had exercised a discreet reticence in regard to a certain experiment of the young inventor, of which he had been an accidental witness.

A SAPPHO OF GREEN SPRINGS

CHAPTER I

"COME in," said the editor.

The door of the editorial room of the "Excelsior Magazine" began to creak painfully under the hesitating pressure of an uncertain and unfamiliar hand. This continued until, with a start of irritation, the editor faced directly about, throwing his leg over the arm of his chair with a certain youthful dexterity. With one hand gripping its back, the other still grasping a proof-slip, and his pencil in his mouth, he stared at the intruder.

The stranger, despite his hesitating entrance, did not seem in the least disconcerted. He was a tall man, looking even taller by reason of the long formless overcoat he wore, known as a "duster," and by a long straight beard that depended from his chin, which he combed with two reflective fingers as he contemplated the editor. The red dust which still lay in the creases of his garment and in the curves of his soft felt hat, and left a dusty circle like a precipitated halo around his feet, proclaimed him, if not a countryman, a recent inland importation by coach. "Busy?" he said in a grave but pleasant voice. "I kin wait. Don't mind *me*. Go on."

The editor indicated a chair with his disengaged hand and plunged again into his proof-slips. The stranger surveyed the scant furniture and appointments of the office with a look of grave curiosity, and then, taking a chair, fixed an earnest, penetrating gaze on the editor's profile. The editor felt it, and without looking up, said: —

"Well, go on."

"But you 're busy. I kin wait."

"I shall not be less busy this morning. I can listen."

"I want you to give me the name of a certain person who writes in your magazine."

The editor's eye glanced at the second right-hand drawer of his desk. It did not contain the names of his contributors, but what in the traditions of his office was accepted as an equivalent, — a revolver. He had never yet presented either to an inquirer. But he laid aside his proofs, and with a slight darkening of his youthful, discontented face, said, "What do you want to know for?"

The question was so evidently unexpected that the stranger's face colored slightly, and he hesitated. The editor, meanwhile, without taking his eyes from the man, mentally ran over the contents of the last magazine. They had been of a singularly peaceful character. There seemed to be nothing to justify homicide on his part or the stranger's. Yet there was no knowing, and his questioner's bucolic appearance by no means precluded an assault. Indeed, it had been a legend of the office that a predecessor had suffered vicariously from a geological hammer covertly introduced into a scientific controversy by an irate professor.

"As we make ourselves responsible for the conduct of the magazine," continued the young editor, with mature severity, "we do not give up the names of our contributors. If you do not agree with their opinions" —

"But I *do*," said the stranger, with his former composure, "and I reckon that 's why I want to know who wrote those verses called 'Underbrush,' signed 'White Violet,' in your last number. They 're pow'ful pretty."

The editor flushed slightly, and glanced instinctively around, for any unexpected witness of his ludicrous mistake. The fear of ridicule was uppermost in his mind,

and he was more relieved at his mistake not being overheard than at its groundlessness.

"The verses *are* pretty," he said, recovering himself, with a critical air, "and I am glad you like them. But even then, you know, I could not give you the lady's name without her permission. I will write to her and ask it, if you like."

The actual fact was that the verses had been sent to him anonymously from a remote village in the Coast Range, — the address being the post-office and the signature initials.

The stranger looked disturbed. "Then she ain't about here anywhere?" he said, with a vague gesture. "She don't belong to the office?"

The young editor beamed with tolerant superiority: "No, I am sorry to say."

"I should like to have got to see her and kinder asked her a few questions," continued the stranger, with the same reflective seriousness. "You see, it was n't just the rhymin' o' them verses, — and they kinder sing themselves to ye, don't they? — it was n't the chyce o' words, — and I reckon they allus hit the idee in the centre shot every time, — it was n't the idees and moral she sort o' drew out o' what she was tellin', — but it was the straight thing itself, — the truth!"

"The truth?" repeated the editor.

"Yes, sir. I 've bin there. I 've seen all that she 's seen in the brush — the little flicks and checkers o' light and shadder down in the brown dust that you wonder how it ever got through the dark of the woods, and that allus seems to slip away like a snake or a lizard if you grope. I 've heard all that she 's heard there — the creepin', the sighin', and the whisperin' through the bracken and the ground-vines of all that lives there."

"You seem to be a poet yourself," said the editor, with a patronizing smile.

"I 'm a lumberman, up in Mendocino," returned the stranger, with sublime *naïveté*. "Got a mill there. You see, sightin' standin' timber and selectin' from the gen'ral show of the trees in the ground and the lay of roots hez sorter made me take notice." He paused. "Then," he added somewhat despondingly, "you don't know who she is?"

"No," said the editor reflectively; "not even if it is really a *woman* who writes."

"Eh?"

"Well, you see, 'White Violet' may as well be the *nom de plume* of a man as of a woman, especially if adopted for the purpose of mystification. The handwriting, I remember, was more boyish than feminine."

"No," returned the stranger doggedly, "it was n't no *man*. There 's ideas and words there that only come from a woman: baby-talk to the birds, you know, and a kind of fearsome keer of bugs and creepin' things that don't come to a man who wears boots and trousers. Well," he added, with a return to his previous air of resigned disappointment, "I suppose you don't even know what she 's like?"

"No," responded the editor cheerfully. Then following an idea suggested by the odd mingling of sentiment and shrewd perception in the man before him, he added: "Probably not at all like anything you imagine. She may be a mother with three or four children; or an old maid who keeps a boarding-house; or a wrinkled schoolmistress; or a chit of a schoolgirl. I 've had some fair verses from a red-haired girl of fourteen at the seminary," he concluded, with professional coolness.

The stranger regarded him with the naïve wonder of an inexperienced man. Having paid this tribute to his superior knowledge, he regained his previous air of grave perception. "I reckon she ain't none of them. But I 'm keepin' you from your work. Good-by. My name 's

Bowers — Jim Bowers, of Mendocino. If you 're up my way, give me a call. And if you do write to this yer 'White Violet,' and she 's willin', send me her address."

He shook the editor's hand warmly — even in its literal significance of imparting a good deal of his own earnest caloric to the editor's fingers — and left the room. His footfall echoed along the passage and died out, and with it, I fear, all impression of his visit from the editor's mind, as he plunged again into the silent task before him.

Presently he was conscious of a melodious humming and a light, leisurely step at the entrance of the hall. They continued on in an easy harmony and unaffected as the passage of a bird. Both were pleasant and both familiar to the editor. They belonged to Jack Hamlin, by vocation a gambler, by taste a musician, on his way from his apartments on the upper floor, where he had just risen, to drop into his friend's editorial room and glance over the exchanges, as was his habit before breakfast.

The door opened lightly. The editor was conscious of a faint odor of scented soap, a sensation of freshness and cleanliness, the impression of a soft hand like a woman's on his shoulder, and, like a woman's, momentarily and playfully caressing, the passage of a graceful shadow across his desk, and the next moment Jack Hamlin was ostentatiously dusting a chair with an open newspaper preparatory to sitting down.

"You ought to ship that office-boy of yours, if he can't keep things cleaner," he said, suspending his melody to eye grimly the dust which Mr. Bowers had shaken from his departing feet.

The editor did not look up until he had finished revising a difficult paragraph. By that time Mr. Hamlin had comfortably settled himself on a cane sofa, and, possibly out of deference to his surroundings, had subdued his song to a peculiarly low, soft, and heart-breaking whistle as he

unfolded a newspaper. Clean and faultless in his appearance, he had the rare gift of being able to get up at two in the afternoon with much of the dewy freshness and all of the moral superiority of an early riser.

"You ought to have been here just now, Jack," said the editor.

"Not a row, old man, eh?" inquired Jack, with a faint accession of interest.

"No," said the editor, smiling. Then he related the incidents of the previous interview, with a certain humorous exaggeration which was part of his nature.

But Jack did not smile.

"You ought to have booted him out of the ranch on sight," he said. "What right had he to come here prying into a lady's affairs? — at least a lady as far as *he* knows. Of course she 's some old blowzy with frumpled hair trying to rope in a greenhorn with a string of words and phrases," concluded Jack carelessly, who had an equally cynical distrust of the sex and of literature.

"That 's about what I told him," said the editor.

"That 's just what you *should n't* have told him," returned Jack. "You ought to have stuck up for that woman as if she 'd been your own mother. Lord! you fellows don't know how to run a magazine. You ought to let *me* sit on that chair and tackle your customers."

"What would you have done, Jack?" asked the editor, much amused to find that his hitherto invincible hero was not above the ordinary human weakness of offering advice as to editorial conduct.

"Done?" reflected Jack. "Well, first, sonny, I should n't keep a revolver in a drawer that I had to *open* to get at."

"But what would you have said?"

"I should simply have asked him what was the price of lumber at Mendocino," said Jack sweetly; "and when he

told me, I should have said that the samples he was offering out of his own head would n't suit. You see, you don't want any trifling in such matters. You write well enough, my boy," continued he, turning over his paper, "but what you 're lacking in is editorial dignity. But go on with your work. Don't mind me."

Thus admonished, the editor again bent over his desk, and his friend softly took up his suspended song. The editor had not proceeded far in his corrections when Jack's voice again broke the silence.

"Where are those d—d verses, anyway?"

Without looking up, the editor waved his pencil towards an uncut copy of the "Excelsior Magazine" lying on the table.

"You don't suppose I 'm going to *read* them, do you?" said Jack aggrievedly. "Why don't you say what they 're about? That 's your business as editor."

But that functionary, now wholly lost and wandering in the *non sequitur* of an involved passage in the proof before him, only waved an impatient remonstrance with his pencil and knit his brows. Jack, with a sigh, took up the magazine.

A long silence followed, broken only by the hurried rustling of sheets of copy and an occasional exasperated start from the editor. The sun was already beginning to slant a dusty beam across his desk; Jack's whistling had long since ceased. Presently, with an exclamation of relief, the editor laid aside the last proof-sheet and looked up.

Jack Hamlin had closed the magazine, but with one hand thrown over the back of the sofa he was still holding it, his slim forefinger between its leaves to keep the place, and his handsome profile and dark lashes lifted towards the window. The editor, smiling at this unwonted abstraction, said quietly: —

"Well, what do you think of them?"

Jack rose, laid the magazine down, settled his white waistcoat with both hands, and lounged towards his friend with audacious but slightly veiled and shining eyes. "They sort of sing themselves to you," he said quietly, leaning beside the editor's desk, and looking down upon him. After a pause he said, "Then you don't know what she 's like?"

"That 's what Mr. Bowers asked me," remarked the editor.

"D—n Bowers!"

"I suppose you also wish me to write and ask for permission to give you her address?" said the editor, with great gravity.

"No," said Jack coolly. "I propose to give it to *you* within a week, and you will pay me with a breakfast. I should like to have it said that I was once a paid contributor to literature. If I don't give it to you, I 'll stand you a dinner, that 's all."

"Done!" said the editor. "And you know nothing of her now?"

"No," said Jack promptly. "Nor you?"

"No more than I have told you."

"That 'll do. So long!" and Jack, carefully adjusting his glossy hat over his curls at an ominously wicked angle, sauntered lightly from the room. The editor, glancing after his handsome figure and hearing him take up his pretermitted whistle as he passed out, began to think that the contingent dinner was by no means an inevitable prospect.

Howbeit, he plunged once more into his monotonous duties. But the freshness of the day seemed to have departed with Jack, and the later interruptions of foreman and publisher were of a more practical character. It was not until the post arrived that the superscription on one of the letters caught his eye, and revived his former interest.

It was the same hand as that of his unknown contributor's manuscript — ill formed and boyish. He opened the envelope. It contained another poem with the same signature, but also a note — much longer than the brief lines that accompanied the first contribution — was scrawled upon a separate piece of paper. This the editor opened first and read the following, with an amazement that for the moment dominated all other sense: —

MR. EDITOR, — I see you have got my poetry in. But I don't see the spondulix that oughter follow. Perhaps you don't know where to send it. Then I 'll tell you. Send the money to Lock Box 47, Green Springs P. O., per Wells Fargo's Express, and I 'll get it there, on account of my parents not knowing. We 're very high toned, and they would think it 's low making poetry for papers. Send amount usually paid for poetry in your papers. Or maybe you think I make poetry for nothing? That 's where you slip up!

Yours truly,

WHITE VIOLET.

P. S. — If you don't pay for poetry, send this back. It 's as good as what you did put in, and is just as hard to make. You hear me? that 's me — all the time.

WHITE VIOLET.

The editor turned quickly to the new contribution for some corroboration of what he felt must be an extraordinary blunder. But no! The few lines that he hurriedly read breathed the same atmosphere of intellectual repose, gentleness, and imagination as the first contribution. And yet they were in the same handwriting as the singular missive, and both were identical with the previous manuscript.

Had he been the victim of a hoax, and were the verses not original? No; they were distinctly original, local in

color, and even local in the use of certain old English words that were common in the Southwest. He had before noticed the apparent incongruity of the handwriting and the text, and it was possible that for the purposes of disguise the poet might have employed an amanuensis. But how could he reconcile the incongruity of the mercenary and slangy purport of the missive itself with the mental habit of its author? Was it possible that these inconsistent qualities existed in the one individual? He smiled grimly as he thought of his visitor Bowers and his friend Jack. He was startled as he remembered the purely imaginative picture he had himself given to the seriously interested Bowers of the possible incongruous personality of the poetess.

Was he quite fair in keeping this from Jack? Was it really honorable, in view of their wager? It is to be feared that a very human enjoyment of Jack's possible discomfiture, quite as much as any chivalrous friendship, impelled the editor to ring eventually for the office-boy.

"See if Mr. Hamlin is in his rooms."

The editor then sat down, and wrote rapidly as follows: —

DEAR MADAM, — You are as right as you are generous in supposing that only ignorance of your address prevented the manager from previously remitting the honorarium for your beautiful verses. He now begs to send it to you in the manner you have indicated. As the verses have attracted deserved attention, I have been applied to for your address. Should you care to submit it to me to be used at my discretion, I shall feel honored by your confidence. But this is a matter left entirely to your own kindness and better judgment. Meantime, I take pleasure in accepting "White Violet's" present contribution, and remain, dear madam, your obedient servant,

THE EDITOR.

The boy returned as he was folding the letter. Mr. Hamlin was not only *not* in his rooms, but, according to his negro servant Pete, had left town an hour ago for a few days in the country.

"Did he say where?" asked the editor quickly.

"No, sir: he did n't know."

"Very well. Take this to the manager." He addressed the letter, and scrawling a few hieroglyphics on a memorandum tag, tore it off, and handed it with the letter to the boy.

An hour later he stood in the manager's office. "The next number is pretty well made up," he said carelessly, "and I think of taking a day or two off."

"Certainly," said the manager. "It will do you good. Where do you think you 'll go?"

"I have n't quite made up my mind."

CHAPTER II

"HULLO!" said Jack Hamlin.

He had halted his mare at the edge of an abrupt chasm. It did not appear to be fifty feet across, yet its depth must have been nearly two hundred to where the hidden mountain stream, of which it was the banks, alternately slipped, tumbled, and fell with murmuring and monotonous regularity. One or two pine-trees growing on the opposite edge, loosened at the roots, had tilted their straight shafts like spears over the abyss; and the top of one, resting on the upper branches of a sycamore a few yards from him, served as an aerial bridge for the passage of a boy of fourteen, to whom Mr. Hamlin's challenge was addressed.

The boy stopped midway in his perilous transit, and looking down upon the horseman, responded coolly, "Hullo, yourself!"

"Is that the only way across this infernal hole, or the one you prefer for exercise?" continued Hamlin gravely.

The boy sat down on a bough, allowing his bare feet to dangle over the dizzy depths, and critically examined his questioner. Jack had on this occasion modified his usual correct conventional attire by a tasteful combination of a vaquero's costume, and in loose white bullion-fringed trousers, red sash, jacket, and sombrero, looked infinitely more dashing and picturesque than his original. Nevertheless, the boy did not reply. Mr. Hamlin's pride in his usual ascendency over women, children, horses, and all unreasoning animals was deeply nettled. He smiled, however, and said quietly: —

"Come here, George Washington. I want to talk to you."

Without rejecting this august yet impossible title, the boy presently lifted his feet, and carelessly resumed his passage across the chasm until, reaching the sycamore, he began to let himself down squirrel-wise, leap by leap, with an occasional trapeze swinging from bough to bough, dropping at last easily to the ground. Here he appeared to be rather good looking, albeit the sun and air had worked a miracle of brown tan and freckles on his exposed surfaces, until the mottling of his oval cheeks looked like a polished bird's egg. Indeed, it struck Mr. Hamlin that he was as intensely a part of that sylvan seclusion as the hidden brook that murmured, the brown velvet shadows that lay like trappings on the white flanks of his horse, the quivering heat, and the stinging spice of bay. Mr. Hamlin had vague ideas of dryads and fauns, but at that moment would have bet something on the chances of their survival.

"I did not hear what you said just now, general," he remarked, with great elegance of manner, "but I know from your reputation that it could not be a lie. I therefore gather that there *is* another way across."

The boy smiled; rather, his very short upper lip apparently vanished completely over his white teeth, and his very black eyes, which showed a great deal of the white around them, danced in their orbits.

"But *you* could n't find it," he said slyly.

"No more could you find the half dollar I dropped just now, unless I helped you."

Mr. Hamlin, by way of illustration, leaned deeply over his left stirrup, and pointed to the ground. At the same moment a bright half dollar absolutely appeared to glitter in the herbage at the point of his finger. It was a trick that had always brought great pleasure and profit to his young friends, and some loss and discomfiture of wager to his older ones.

The boy picked up the coin: "There 's a dip and a level crossing about a mile over yer," — he pointed, — "but it 's through the woods, and they 're that high with thick bresh."

"With what?"

"Bresh," repeated the boy; "*that*," — pointing to a few fronds of bracken growing in the shadow of the sycamore.

"Oh! underbrush?"

"Yes; I said 'bresh,'" returned the boy doggedly. "*You* might get through, ef you war spry, but not your hoss. Where do you want to go, anyway?"

"Do you know, George," said Mr. Hamlin, lazily throwing his right leg over the horn of his saddle for greater ease and deliberation in replying, "it 's very odd, but that 's just what *I 'd* like to know. Now, what would *you*, in your broad statesmanlike views of things generally, advise?"

Quite convinced of the stranger's mental unsoundness, the boy glanced again at his half dollar, as if to make sure of its integrity, pocketed it doubtfully, and turned away.

"Where are you going?" said Hamlin, resuming his seat with the agility of a circus rider, and spurring forward.

"To Green Springs, where I live, two miles over the ridge on the far slope," — indicating the direction.

"Ah!" said Jack, with thoughtful gravity. "Well, kindly give my love to your sister, will you?"

"George Washington did n't have no sister," said the boy cunningly.

"Can I have been mistaken?" said Hamlin, lifting his hand to his forehead with grieved accents. "Then it seems *you* have. Kindly give her my love."

"Which one?" asked the boy, with a swift glance of mischief. "I 've got four."

"The one that 's like you," returned Hamlin, with

prompt exactitude. "Now, where 's the ' bresh ' you spoke of?"

"Keep along the edge until you come to the log-slide. Foller that, and it 'll lead you into the woods. But ye won't go far, I tell ye. When you have to turn back, instead o' comin' back here, you kin take the trail that goes round the woods, and that 'll bring ye out into the stage road ag'in near the post-office at the Green Springs crossin' and the new hotel. That 'll be war ye 'll turn up, I reckon," he added reflectively. "Fellers that come yer gunnin' and fishin' gin'rally do," he concluded, with a half-inquisitive air.

"Ah?" said Mr. Hamlin, quietly shedding the inquiry. "Green Springs Hotel is where the stage stops, eh?"

"Yes, and at the post-office," said the boy. "She 'll be along here soon," he added.

"If you mean the Santa Cruz stage," said Hamlin, "she 's here already. I passed her on the ridge half an hour ago."

The boy gave a sudden start, and a quick uneasy expression passed over his face. "Go 'long with ye!" he said, with a forced smile; "it ain't her time yet."

"But I *saw* her," repeated Hamlin, much amused. "Are you expecting company? Hullo! Where are you off to? Come back."

But his companion had already vanished in the thicket with the undeliberate and impulsive act of an animal. There was a momentary rustle in the alders fifty feet away, and then all was silent. The hidden brook took up its monotonous murmur, the tapping of a distant woodpecker became suddenly audible, and Mr. Hamlin was again alone.

"Wonder whether he 's got parents in the stage, and has been playing truant here," he mused lazily. "Looked as if he 'd been up to some devilment, or more like as if he was primed for it. If he 'd been a little older, I 'd have

bet he was in league with some road agents to watch the coach. Just my luck to have him light out as I was beginning to get some talk out of him." He paused, looked at his watch, and straightened himself in his stirrups. "Four o'clock. I reckon I might as well try the woods and what that imp calls the 'bresh;' I may strike a shanty or a native by the way."

With this determination, Mr. Hamlin urged his horse along the faint trail by the brink of the watercourse which the boy had just indicated. He had no definite end in view beyond the one that had brought him the day before to that locality — his quest of the unknown poetess. His clue would have seemed to ordinary humanity the faintest. He had merely noted the provincial name of a certain plant mentioned in the poem, and learned that its habitat was limited to the southern local range; while its peculiar nomenclature was clearly of French Creole or Gulf State origin. This gave him a large though sparsely populated area for locality, while it suggested a settlement of Louisianians or Mississippians near the Summit, of whom, through their native gambling proclivities, he was professionally cognizant. But he mainly trusted Fortune. Secure in his faith in the feminine character of that goddess, he relied a great deal on her well-known weakness for scamps of his quality.

It was not long before he came to the "slide" — a lightly cut or shallow ditch. It descended slightly in a course that was far from straight, at times diverging to avoid the obstacles of trees or boulders, at times shaving them so closely as to leave smooth abrasions along their sides made by the grinding passage of long logs down the incline. The track itself was slippery from this, and preoccupied all Hamlin's skill as a horseman, even to the point of stopping his usual careless whistle. At the end of half an hour the track became level again, and he was confronted with a singular phenomenon.

He had entered the wood, and the trail seemed to cleave through a far-stretching, motionless sea of ferns that flowed on either side to the height of his horse's flanks. The straight shafts of the trees rose like columns from their hidden bases and were lost again in a roof of impenetrable leafage, leaving a clear space of fifty feet between, through which the surrounding horizon of sky was perfectly visible. All the light that entered this vast sylvan hall came from the sides; nothing permeated from above; nothing radiated from below; the height of the crest on which the wood was placed gave it this lateral illumination, but gave it also the profound isolation of some temple raised by long-forgotten hands. In spite of the height of these clear shafts, they seemed dwarfed by the expanse of the wood, and in the farthest perspective the base of ferns and the capital of foliage appeared almost to meet. As the boy had warned him, the slide had turned aside, skirting the wood to follow the incline, and presently the little trail he now followed vanished utterly, leaving him and his horse adrift breast-high in this green and yellow sea of fronds. But Mr. Hamlin, imperious of obstacles, and touched by some curiosity, continued to advance lazily, taking the bearings of a larger redwood in the centre of the grove for his objective point. The elastic mass gave way before him, brushing his knees or combing his horse's flanks with widespread elfin fingers, and closing up behind him as he passed, as if to obliterate any track by which he might return. Yet his usual luck did not desert him here. Being on horseback, he found that he could detect what had been invisible to the boy and probably to all pedestrians, namely, that the growth was not equally dense, that there were certain thinner and more open spaces that he could take advantage of by more circuitous progression, always, however, keeping the bearings of the central tree. This he at last reached, and halted his

panting horse. Here a new idea which had been haunting him since he entered the wood took fuller possession of him. He had seen or known all this before! There was a strange familiarity either in these objects or in the impression or spell they left upon him. He remembered the verses! Yes, this was the "underbrush" which the poetess had described: the gloom above and below, the light that seemed blown through it like the wind, the suggestion of hidden life beneath this tangled luxuriance, which she alone had penetrated, — all this was here. But more than that, here was the atmosphere that she had breathed into the plaintive melody of her verse. It did not necessarily follow that Mr. Hamlin's translation of her sentiment was the correct one, or that the ideas her verses had provoked in his mind were at all what had been hers: in his easy susceptibility he was simply thrown into a corresponding mood of emotion and relieved himself with song. One of the verses he had already associated in his mind with the rhythm of an old plantation melody, and it struck his fancy to take advantage of the solitude to try its effect. Humming to himself, at first softly, he at last grew bolder, and let his voice drift away through the stark pillars of the sylvan colonnade till it seemed to suffuse and fill it with no more effort than the light which strayed in on either side. Sitting thus, his hat thrown a little back from his clustering curls, the white neck and shoulders of his horse uplifting him above the crested mass of fern, his red sash the one fleck of color in their olive depths, I am afraid he looked much more like the real minstrel of the grove than the unknown poetess who transfigured it. But this, as has been already indicated, was Jack Hamlin's peculiar gift. Even as he had previously outshone the vaquero in his borrowed dress, he now silenced and supplanted a few fluttering bluejays — rightful tenants of the wood — with a more graceful and airy presence and a far sweeter voice.

The open horizon towards the west had taken a warmer color from the already slanting sun when Mr. Hamlin, having rested his horse, turned to that direction. He had noticed that the wood was thinner there, and pushing forward, he was presently rewarded by the sound of far-off wheels, and knew he must be near the highroad that the boy had spoken of. Having given up his previous intention of crossing the stream, there seemed nothing better for him to do than to follow the truant's advice and take the road back to Green Springs. Yet he was loath to leave the wood, halting on its verge, and turning to look back into its charmed recesses. Once or twice — perhaps because he recalled the words of the poem — that yellowish sea of ferns had seemed instinct with hidden life, and he had even fancied, here and there, a swaying of its plumed crests. Howbeit, he still lingered long enough for the open sunlight into which he had obtruded to point out the bravery of his handsome figure. Then he wheeled his horse, the light glanced from polished double bit and bridle-fripperies, caught his red sash and bullion buttons, struck a parting flash from his silver spurs, and he was gone!

For a moment the light streamed unbrokenly through the wood. And then it could be seen that the yellow mass of undergrowth *had* moved with the passage of another figure than his own. For ever since he had entered the shade, a woman, shawled in a vague, shapeless fashion, had watched him wonderingly, eagerly, excitedly, gliding from tree to tree as he advanced, or else dropping breathlessly below the fronds of fern whence she gazed at him as between parted fingers. When he wheeled she had run openly to the west, albeit with hidden face and still clinging shawl, and taken a last look at his retreating figure. And then, with a faint but lingering sigh, she drew back into the shadow of the wood again and vanished also.

CHAPTER III

At the end of twenty minutes Mr. Hamlin reined in his mare. He had just observed, in the distant shadows of a by-lane that intersected his road, the vanishing flutter of two light print dresses. Without a moment's hesitation he lightly swerved out of the highroad and followed the retreating figures.

As he neared them, they seemed to be two slim young girls, evidently so preoccupied with the rustic amusement of edging each other off the grassy border into the dust of the track that they did not perceive his approach. Little shrieks, slight scufflings, and interjections of "Cynthy! you limb!" "Quit that, Eunice, now!" and "I just call that real mean!" apparently drowned the sound of his canter in the soft dust. Checking his speed to a gentle trot, and pressing his horse close beside the opposite fence, he passed them with gravely uplifted hat and a serious, preoccupied air. But in that single, seemingly conventional glance, Mr. Hamlin had seen that they were both pretty, and that one had the short upper lip of his errant little guide. A hundred yards farther on he halted, as if irresolutely, gazed doubtfully ahead of him, and then turned back. An expression of innocent — almost childlike — concern was clouding the rascal's face. It was well, as the two girls had drawn closely together, having been apparently surprised in the midst of a glowing eulogium of this glorious passing vision by its sudden return. At his nearer approach, the one with the short upper lip hid that piquant feature and the rest of her rosy face behind the other's

shoulder, which was suddenly and significantly opposed to the advance of this handsome intruder, with a certain dignity, half real, half affected, but wholly charming. The protectress appeared — possibly from her defensive attitude — the superior of her companion.

Audacious as Jack was to his own sex, he had early learned that such rare but discomposing graces as he possessed required a certain apologetic attitude when presented to women, and that it was only a plain man who could be always complacently self-confident in their presence. There was, consequently, a hesitating lowering of this hypocrite's brown eyelashes as he said, in almost pained accents: —

"Excuse me, but I fear I 've taken the wrong road. I 'm going to Green Springs."

"I reckon you 've taken the wrong road, wherever you 're going," returned the young lady, having apparently made up her mind to resent each of Jack's perfections as a separate impertinence: "this is a *private* road." She drew herself fairly up here, although gurgled at in the ear and pinched in the arm by her companion.

"I beg your pardon," said Jack meekly. "I see I 'm trespassing on your grounds. I 'm very sorry. Thank you for telling me. I should have gone on a mile or two farther, I suppose, until I came to your house," he added innocently.

"A mile or two! You 'd have run chock ag'in' our gate in another minit," said the short-lipped one eagerly. But a sharp nudge from her companion sent her back again into cover, where she waited expectantly for another crushing retort from her protector.

But, alas, it did not come. One cannot be always witty, and Jack looked distressed. Nevertheless, he took advantage of the pause.

"It was so stupid in me, as I think your brother" — looking at Short-lip — "very carefully told me the road."

The two girls darted quick glances at each other. "Oh, Bawb!" said the first speaker in wearied accents, — "*that* limb! He don't keer."

"But he *did* care," said Hamlin quietly, "and gave me a good deal of information. Thanks to him, I was able to see that ferny wood that 's so famous — about two miles up the road. You know — the one that there 's a poem written about!"

The shot told! Short-lip burst into a display of dazzling little teeth and caught the other girl convulsively by the shoulders. The superior girl bent her pretty brows, and said, "Eunice, what 's gone of ye? Quit that!" but, as Hamlin thought, paled slightly.

"Of course," said Hamlin quickly, "you know — the poem everybody 's talking about. Dear me! let me see! how does it go?" The rascal knit his brows, said, "Ah, yes," and then murmured the verse he had lately sung quite as musically.

Short-lip was shamelessly exalted and excited. Really she could scarcely believe it! She already heard herself relating the whole occurrence. Here was the most beautiful young man she had ever seen — an entire stranger — talking to them in the most beautiful and natural way, right in the lane, and reciting poetry to her sister! It was like a novel — only more so. She thought that Cynthia, on the other hand, looked distressed, and — she must say it — "silly."

All of which Jack noted, and was wise. He had got all he wanted — at present. He gathered up his reins.

"Thank you so much, and your brother, too, Miss Cynthia," he said, without looking up. Then, adding, with a parting glance and smile, "But don't tell Bob how stupid I was," he swiftly departed.

In half an hour he was at the Green Springs Hotel. As he rode into the stable yard, he noticed that the coach had

only just arrived, having been detained by a landslip on the Summit road. With the recollection of Bob fresh in his mind, he glanced at the loungers at the stage-office. The boy was not there, but a moment later Jack detected him among the waiting crowd at the post-office opposite. With a view of following up his inquiries, he crossed the road as the boy entered the vestibule of the post-office. He arrived in time to see him unlock one of a row of numbered letter-boxes rented by subscribers, which occupied a partition by the window, and take out a small package and a letter. But in that brief glance Mr. Hamlin detected the printed address of the "Excelsior Magazine" on the wrapper. It was enough. Luck was certainly with him.

He had time to get rid of the wicked sparkle that had lit his dark eyes, and to lounge carelessly towards the boy as the latter broke open the package, and then hurriedly concealed it in his jacket pocket, and started for the door. Mr. Hamlin quickly followed him, unperceived, and as he stepped into the street, gently tapped him on the shoulder. The boy turned and faced him quickly. But Mr. Hamlin's eyes showed nothing but lazy good humor.

"Hullo, Bob. Where are you going?"

The boy again looked up suspiciously at this revelation of his name.

"Home," he said briefly.

"Oh, over yonder," said Hamlin calmly. "I don't mind walking with you as far as the lane."

He saw the boy's eyes glance furtively towards an alley that ran beside the blacksmith's shop a few rods ahead, and was convinced that he intended to evade him there. Slipping his arm carelessly in the youth's, he concluded to open fire at once.

"Bob," he said, with irresistible gravity, "I did not know when I met you this morning that I had the honor of addressing a poet — none other than the famous author of 'Underbrush.'"

The boy started back, and endeavored to withdraw his arm, but Mr. Hamlin tightened his hold, without, however, changing his careless expression.

"You see," he continued, "the editor is a friend of mine; and being afraid this package might not get into the right hands, — as you did n't give your name, — he deputized me to come here and see that it was all square. As you 're rather young, for all you 're so gifted, I reckon I 'd better go home with you, and take a receipt from your parents. That 's about square, I think?"

The consternation of the boy was so evident and so far beyond Mr. Hamlin's expectation that he instantly halted him, gazed into his shifting eyes, and gave a long whistle.

"Who said it was for *me?* Wot you talkin' about? Lemme go!" gasped the boy, with the short intermittent breath of mingled fear and passion.

"Bob," said Mr. Hamlin in a singularly colorless voice which was very rare with him, and an expression quite unlike his own, "what is your little game?"

The boy looked down in dogged silence.

"Out with it! Who are you playing this on?"

"It 's all among my own folks; it 's nothin' to *you,*" said the boy, suddenly beginning to struggle violently, as if inspired by this extenuating fact.

"Among your own folks, eh? White Violet and the rest, eh? But *she 's* not in it?"

No reply.

"Hand me over that package. I 'll give it back to you again."

The boy handed it to Mr. Hamlin. He read the letter, and found the inclosure contained a twenty-dollar gold piece. A half-supercilious smile passed over his face at this revelation of the inadequate emoluments of literature and the trifling inducements to crime. Indeed, I fear the affair began to take a less serious moral complexion in his eyes.

"Then White Violet — your sister Cynthia, you know," continued Mr. Hamlin, in easy parenthesis — "wrote for this?" holding the coin contemplatively in his fingers, "and you calculated to nab it yourself?"

The quick searching glance with which Bob received the name of his sister Mr. Hamlin attributed only to his natural surprise that this stranger should be on such familiar terms with her; but the boy responded immediately and bluntly: —

"No! *She* did n't write for it. She did n't want nobody to know who she was. Nobody wrote for it but me. Nobody *knew folks was paid for po'try but me.* I found it out from a feller. I wrote for it. *I* was n't goin' to let that skunk of an editor have it himself!"

"And you thought *you* would take it," said Hamlin, his voice resuming its old tone. "Well, George — I mean Bob, your conduct was praiseworthy, although your intentions were bad. Still, twenty dollars is rather too much for your trouble. Suppose we say five and call it square?" He handed the astonished boy five dollars. "Now, George Washington," he continued, taking four other twenty-dollar pieces from his pocket, and adding them to the inclosure, which he carefully refolded, "I 'm going to give you another chance to live up to your reputation. You 'll take that package, and hand it to White Violet, and say you found it, just as it is, in the lock box. I 'll keep the letter, for it would knock you endways if it was seen, and I 'll make it all right with the editor. But as I 've got to tell him that I 've seen White Violet myself, and know she 's got it, I expect *you* to manage in some way to have me see her. I 'll manage the rest of it; and I won't blow on you, either. You 'll come back to the hotel, and tell me what you 've done. And now, George," concluded Mr. Hamlin, succeeding at last in fixing the boy's evasive eye with a peculiar look, "it may be just as well for you to

understand that I know every nook and corner of this place, that I 've already been through that underbrush you spoke of once this morning, and that I 've got a mare that can go wherever *you* can, and a d—d sight quicker!"

"I 'll give the package to White Violet," said the boy doggedly.

"And you 'll come back to the hotel?"

The boy hesitated, and then said, "I 'll come back."

"All right, then. Adios, general."

Bob disappeared around the corner of a cross-road at a rapid trot, and Mr. Hamlin turned into the hotel.

"Smart little chap that!" he said to the barkeeper.

"You bet!" returned the man, who, having recognized Mr. Hamlin, was delighted at the prospect of conversing with a gentleman of such decidedly dangerous reputation. "But he 's been allowed to run a little wild since old man Delatour died, and the widder 's got enough to do, I reckon, lookin' arter her four gals, and takin' keer of old Delatour's ranch over yonder. I guess it 's pretty hard sleddin' for her sometimes to get clo'es and grub for the famerly, without follerin' Bob around."

"Sharp girls, too, I reckon; one of them writes things for the magazines, does n't she? — Cynthia, eh?" said Mr. Hamlin carelessly.

Evidently this fact was not a notorious one to the barkeeper. He, however, said, "Dunno; mabbe; her father was eddicated, and the widder Delatour, too, though she 's sorter queer, I 've heard tell. Lord! Mr. Hamlin, *you* oughter remember old man Delatour! From Opelousas, Louisiany, you know! High old sport — French style, frilled bosom — open-handed, and us'ter buck ag'in' faro awful! Why, he dropped a heap o' money to *you* over in San José two years ago at poker! You must remember him!"

The slightest possible flush passed over Mr. Hamlin's

brow under the shadow of his hat, but did not get lower than his eyes. He suddenly *had* recalled the spendthrift Delatour perfectly, and as quickly regretted now that he had not doubled the honorarium he had just sent to his portionless daughter. But he only said coolly, "No," and then, raising his pale face and audacious eyes, continued in his laziest and most insulting manner, "no: the fact is, my mind is just now preoccupied in wondering if the gas is leaking anywhere, and if anything is ever served over this bar except elegant conversation. When the gentleman who mixes drinks comes back, perhaps you 'll be good enough to tell him to send a whiskey sour to Mr. Jack Hamlin in the parlor. Meantime, you can turn off your soda-fountain: I don't want any fizz in mine."

Having thus quite recovered himself, Mr. Hamlin lounged gracefully across the hall into the parlor. As he did so, a darkish young man, with a slim boyish figure, a thin face, and a discontented expression, rose from an arm-chair, held out his hand, and, with a saturnine smile, said: —

"Jack!"

"Fred!"

The two men remained gazing at each other with a half-amused, half-guarded expression. Mr. Hamlin was first to begin. "I did n't think *you 'd* be such a fool as to try on this kind of thing, Fred," he said half seriously.

"Yes, but it was to keep you from being a much bigger one that I hunted you up," said the editor mischievously. "Read that. I got it an hour after you left." And he placed a little triumphantly in Jack's hand the letter he had received from White Violet.

Mr. Hamlin read it with an unmoved face, and then laid his two hands on the editor's shoulders. "Yes, my young friend, and you sat down and wrote her a pretty letter and sent her twenty dollars — which, permit me to say, was

d—d poor pay! But that is n't your fault, I reckon: it 's the meanness of your proprietors."

"But it is n't the question, either, just now, Jack, however you have been able to answer it. Do you mean to say seriously that you want to know anything more of a woman who could write such a letter?"

"I don't know," said Jack cheerfully. "She might be a devilish sight funnier than if she had n't written it — which is the fact."

"You mean to say *she* did n't write it?"

"Yes."

"Who did, then?"

"Her brother Bob."

After a moment's scrutiny of his friend's bewildered face, Mr. Hamlin briefly related his adventures, from the moment of his meeting Bob at the mountain stream to the barkeeper's gossiping comment and sequel. "Therefore," he concluded, "the author of 'Underbrush' is Miss Cynthia Delatour, one of four daughters of a widow who lives two miles from here at the crossing. I shall see her this evening and make sure; but to-morrow morning you will pay me the breakfast you owe me. She 's good looking, but I can't say I fancy the poetic style: it 's a little too high toned for me. However, I love my love with a C, because she is your Contributor; I hate her with a C, because of her Connections; I met her by Chance and treated her with Civility; her name is Cynthia, and she lives on a Cross-road."

"But you surely don't expect you will ever see Bob again!" said the editor impatiently. "You have trusted him with enough to start him for the Sandwich Islands, to say nothing of the ruinous precedent you have established in his mind of the value of poetry. I am surprised that a man of your knowledge of the world would have faith in that imp the second time."

"My knowledge of the world," returned Mr. Hamlin sententiously, "tells me that 's the only way you can trust anybody. *Once* does n't make a habit, nor show a character. I could see by his bungling that he had never tried this on before. Just now the temptation to wipe out his punishment by doing the square thing, and coming back a sort of hero, is stronger than any other. 'T is n't everybody that gets that chance," he added, with an odd laugh.

Nevertheless, three hours passed without bringing Bob. The two men had gone to the billiard-room, when a waiter brought a note, which he handed to Mr. Hamlin with some apologetic hesitation. It bore no superscription, but had been brought by a boy who described Mr. Hamlin perfectly, and requested that the note should be handed to him with the remark that "Bob had come back."

"And is he there now?" asked Mr. Hamlin, holding the letter unopened in his hand.

"No, sir; he run right off."

The editor laughed; but Mr. Hamlin, having perused the note, put away his cue. "Come into my room," he said.

The editor followed, and Mr. Hamlin laid the note before him on the table. "Bob 's all right," he said, "for I 'll bet a thousand dollars that note is genuine."

It was delicately written, in a cultivated feminine hand, utterly unlike the scrawl that had first excited the editor's curiosity, and ran as follows: —

He who brought me the bounty of your friend — for I cannot call a recompense so far above my deserts by any other name — gives me also to understand that you wished for an interview. I cannot believe that this is mere idle curiosity, or that you have any motive that is not kindly and honorable; but I feel that I must beg and pray you not to seek to remove the veil behind which I have chosen to hide myself and my poor efforts from identification. I

think I know you — I *know* I know myself — well enough to believe it would give neither of us any happiness. You will say to your generous friend that he has already given the Unknown more comfort and hope than could come from any personal compliment or publicity, and you will yourself believe that you have all unconsciously brightened a sad woman's fancy with a Dream and a Vision that before to-day had been unknown to

WHITE VIOLET.

"Have you read it?" asked Mr. Hamlin.

"Yes."

"Then you don't want to see it any more, or even remember you ever saw it," said Mr. Hamlin, carefully tearing the note into small pieces and letting them drift from the windows like blown blossoms.

"But, I say, Jack! look here; I don't understand! You say you have already seen this woman, and yet" —

"I *haven't* seen her," said Jack composedly, turning from the window.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you and I, Fred, are going to drop this fooling right here and leave this place for 'Frisco by first stage to-morrow, and — that I owe you that dinner."

CHAPTER IV

When the stage for San Francisco rolled away the next morning with Mr. Hamlin and the editor, the latter might have recognized in the occupant of a dust-covered buggy that was coming leisurely towards them the tall figure, long beard, and straight duster of his late visitor, Mr. James Bowers. For Mr. Bowers was on the same quest that the others had just abandoned. Like Mr. Hamlin, he had been left to his own resources, but Mr. Bowers's resources were a lifelong experience and technical skill; he too had noted the topographical indications of the poem, and his knowledge of the sylva of Upper California pointed as unerringly as Mr. Hamlin's luck to the cryptogamous haunts of the Summit. Such abnormal growths were indicative of certain localities only, but, as they were not remunerative from a pecuniary point of view, were to be avoided by the sagacious woodman. It was clear, therefore, that Mr. Bowers's visit to Green Springs was not professional, and that he did not even figuratively accept the omen.

He baited and rested his horse at the hotel, where his bucolic exterior, however, did not elicit that attention which had been accorded to Mr. Hamlin's charming insolence or the editor's cultivated manner. But he glanced over a township map on the walls of the reading-room, and took note of the names of the owners of different lots, farms, and ranches, passing that of Delatour with the others. Then he drove leisurely in the direction of the woods, and, reaching them, tied his horse to a young sapling in the shade, and entered their domain with a shambling but familiar woodman's step.

It is not the purpose of this brief chronicle to follow Mr. Bowers in his professional diagnosis of the locality. He recognized Nature in one of her moods of wasteful extravagance, — a waste that his experienced eye could tell was also sapping the vitality of those outwardly robust shafts that rose around him. He knew, without testing them, that half of these fair-seeming columns were hollow and rotten at the core; he could detect the chill odor of decay through the hot balsamic spices stirred by the wind that streamed through their long aisles, — like incense mingling with the exhalations of a crypt. He stopped now and then to part the heavy fronds down to their roots in the dank moss, seeing again, as he had told the editor, the weird *second* twilight through their miniature stems, and the microcosm of life that filled it. But even while paying this tribute to the accuracy of the unknown poetess, he was, like his predecessor, haunted more strongly by the atmosphere and melody of her verse. Its spell was upon him, too. Unlike Mr. Hamlin, he did not sing. He only halted once or twice, silently combing his straight, narrow beard with his three fingers, until the action seemed to draw down the lines of his face into limitless dejection, and an inscrutable melancholy filled his small gray eyes. The few birds which had hailed Mr. Hamlin as their successful rival fled away before the grotesque and angular half length of Mr. Bowers, as if the wind had blown in a scarecrow from the distant farms.

Suddenly he observed the figure of a woman, with her back towards him, leaning motionless against a tree, and apparently gazing intently in the direction of Green Springs. He had approached so near to her that it was singular she had not heard him. Mr. Bowers was a bashful man in the presence of the other sex. He felt exceedingly embarrassed; if he could have gone away without attracting her attention he would have done so. Neither

could he remain silent, a tacit spy of her meditation. He had recourse to a polite but singularly artificial cough.

To his surprise, she gave a faint cry, turned quickly towards him, and then shrank back and lapsed quite helpless against the tree. Her evident distress overcame his bashfulness. He ran towards her.

"I 'm sorry I frighted ye, ma'am, but I was afraid I might skeer ye more if I lay low, and said nothin'."

Even then, if she had been some fair young country girl, he would have relapsed after this speech into his former bashfulness. But the face and figure she turned towards him were neither young nor fair: a woman past forty, with gray threads and splashes in her brushed-back hair, which was turned over her ears in two curls like frayed strands of rope. Her forehead was rather high than broad, her nose large but well shaped, and her eyes full, but so singularly light in color as to seem almost sightless. The short upper lip of her large mouth displayed her teeth in an habitual smile, which was in turn so flatly contradicted by every other line of her careworn face that it seemed gratuitously artificial. Her figure was hidden by a shapeless garment that partook equally of the shawl, cloak, and wrapper.

"I am very foolish," she began in a voice and accent that at once asserted a cultivated woman, "but I so seldom meet anybody here that a voice quite startled me. That and the heat," she went on, wiping her face, into which the color was returning violently — "for I seldom go out as early as this — I suppose affected me."

Mr. Bowers had that innate Far-Western reverence for womanhood which I fancy challenges the most polished politeness. He remained patient, undemonstrative, self-effacing, and respectful before her, his angular arm slightly but not obtrusively advanced, the offer of protection being in the act rather than in any spoken word, and requiring no response.

"Like as not, ma'am," he said cheerfully, looking everywhere but in her burning face. "The sun *is* pow'ful hot at this time o' day; I felt it myself comin' yer; and though the damp of this timber kinder sets it back, it 's likely to come out ag'in. Ye can't check it no more than the sap in that choked limb thar" — he pointed ostentatiously where a fallen pine had been caught in the bent and twisted arm of another, but which still put out a few green tassels beyond the point of impact. "Do you live far from here, ma'am?" he added.

"Only as far as the first turning below the hill."

"I 've got my buggy here, and I 'm goin' that way, and I can jist set ye down thar cool and comfortable. Ef," he continued in the same assuring tone, without waiting for a reply, "ye 'll jist take a good grip of my arm thar," curving his wrist and hand behind him like a shepherd's crook, "I 'll go first, and break away the brush for ye."

She obeyed mechanically, and they fared on through the thick ferns in this fashion for some moments, he looking ahead, occasionally dropping a word of caution or encouragement, but never glancing at her face. When they reached the buggy he lifted her into it carefully, — and perpendicularly, it struck her afterwards, very much as if she had been a transplanted sapling with bared and sensitive roots, — and then gravely took his place beside her.

"Bein' in the timber trade myself, ma'am," he said, gathering up the reins, "I chanced to sight these woods, and took a look around. My name is Bowers, of Mendocino; I reckon there ain't much that grows in the way o' standin' timber on the Pacific Slope that I don't know and can't locate, though I *do* say it. I 've got ez big a mill, and ez big a run in my district, ez there is anywhere. Ef you 're ever up my way, you ask for Bowers — Jim Bowers — and that 's *me*."

There is probably nothing more conducive to conversa-

tion between strangers than a wholesome and early recognition of each other's foibles. Mr. Bowers, believing his chance acquaintance a superior woman, naïvely spoke of himself in a way that he hoped would reassure her that she was not compromising herself in accepting his civility, and so satisfy what must be her inevitable pride. On the other hand, the woman regained her self-possession by this exhibition of Mr. Bowers's vanity, and, revived by the refreshing breeze caused by the rapid motion of the buggy along the road, thanked him graciously.

"I suppose there are many strangers at the Green Springs Hotel," she said, after a pause.

"I didn't get to see 'em, as I only put up my hoss there," he replied. "But I know the stage took some away this mornin': it seemed pretty well loaded up when I passed it."

The woman drew a deep sigh. The act struck Mr. Bowers as a possible return of her former nervous weakness. Her attention must at once be distracted at any cost — even conversation.

"Perhaps," he began, with sudden and appalling lightness, "I 'm a-talkin' to Mrs. McFadden?"

"No," said the woman abstractedly.

"Then it must be Mrs. Delatour? There are only two township lots on that cross-road."

"My name *is* Delatour," she said somewhat wearily.

Mr. Bowers was conversationally stranded. He was not at all anxious to know her name, yet, knowing it now, it seemed to suggest that there was nothing more to say. He would, of course, have preferred to ask her if she had read the poetry about the Underbrush, and if she knew the poetess, and what she thought of it; but the fact that she appeared to be an "eddicated" woman made him sensitive of displaying technical ignorance in his manner of talking about it. She might ask him if it was "subjective" or

"objective" — two words he had heard used at the Debating Society at Mendocino on the question, "Is poetry morally beneficial?" For a few moments he was silent. But presently she took the initiative in conversation, at first slowly and abstractedly, and then, as if appreciating his sympathetic reticence, or mayhap finding some relief in monotonous expression, talked mechanically, deliberately, but unostentatiously about herself. So colorless was her intonation that at times it did not seem as if she was talking to him, but repeating some conversation she had held with another.

She had lived there ever since she had been in California. Her husband had bought the Spanish title to the property when they first married. The property at his death was found to be greatly involved; she had been obliged to part with much of it to support her children — four girls and a boy. She had been compelled to withdraw the girls from the convent at Santa Clara to help about the house; the boy was too young — she feared, too shiftless — to do anything. The farm did not pay; the land was poor; she knew nothing about farming; she had been brought up in New Orleans, where her father had been a judge, and she did n't understand country life. Of course she had been married too young — as all girls were. Lately she had thought of selling off and moving to San Francisco, where she would open a boarding-house or a school for young ladies. He could advise her, perhaps, of some good opportunity. Her own girls were far enough advanced to assist her in teaching; one particularly, Cynthia, was quite clever, and spoke French and Spanish fluently.

As Mr. Bowers was familiar with many of these counts in the feminine American indictment of life generally, he was not, perhaps, greatly moved. But in the last sentence he thought he saw an opening to return to his main object, and, looking up cautiously, said: —

"And mebbe write po'try now and then?"

To his great discomfiture, the only effect of this suggestion was to check his companion's speech for some moments and apparently throw her back into her former abstraction. Yet after a long pause, as they were turning into the lane, she said, as if continuing the subject: —

"I only hope that, whatever my daughters may do, they won't marry young."

The yawning breaches in the Delatour gates and fences presently came in view. They were supposed to be reinforced by half a dozen dogs, who, however, did their duty with what would seem to be the prevailing inefficiency, retiring after a single perfunctory yelp to shameless stretching, scratching, and slumber. Their places were taken on the veranda by two negro servants, two girls respectively of eight and eleven, and a boy of fourteen, who remained silently staring. As Mr. Bowers had accepted the widow's polite invitation to enter, she was compelled, albeit in an equally dazed and helpless way, to issue some preliminary orders: —

"Now, Chloe — I mean Aunt Dinah — do take Eunice — I mean Victorine and Una — away, and — you know — tidy them; and you, Sarah — it 's Sarah, is n't it? — lay some refreshment in the parlor for this gentleman. And, Bob, tell your sister Cynthia to come here with Eunice." As Bob still remained staring at Mr. Bowers, she added, in weary explanation, "Mr. Bowers brought me over from the Summit woods in his buggy — it was so hot. There — shake hands and thank him, and run away — do!"

They crossed a broad but scantily furnished hall. Everywhere the same look of hopeless incompleteness, temporary utility, and premature decay; most of the furniture was mismatched and misplaced; many of the rooms had changed their original functions or doubled them; a smell of cooking came from the library, on whose shelves, mingled with

books, were dresses and household linen; and through the door of a room into which Mrs. Delatour retired to remove her duster Mr. Bowers caught a glimpse of a bed, and of a table covered with books and papers, at which a tall, fair girl was writing. In a few moments Mrs. Delatour returned, accompanied by this girl, and Eunice, her short-lipped sister. Bob, who joined the party seated around Mr. Bowers and a table set with cake, a decanter, and glasses, completed the group. Emboldened by the presence of the tall Cynthia and his glimpse of her previous literary attitude, Mr. Bowers resolved to make one more attempt.

"I suppose these yer young ladies sometimes go to the wood, too?" As his eye rested on Cynthia, she replied: —

"Oh yes."

"I reckon on account of the purty shadows down in the brush, and the soft light, eh? and all that?" he continued, with a playful manner but a serious accession of color.

"Why, the woods belong to us. It 's mar's property!" broke in Eunice, with a flash of teeth.

"Well, Lordy, I wanter know!" said Mr. Bowers in some astonishment. "Why, that 's right in my line, too! I 've been sightin' timber all along here, and that 's how I dropped in on yer mar." Then seeing a look of eagerness light up the faces of Bob and Eunice, he was encouraged to make the most of his opportunity. "Why, ma'am," he went on cheerfully, "I reckon you 're holdin' that wood at a pretty stiff figger, now."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Delatour simply.

Mr. Bowers delivered a wink at Bob and Eunice, who were still watching him with anxiety. "Well, not on account of the actool timber, for the best of it ain't sound," he said, "but on account of its bein' famous! Everybody that reads that pow'ful pretty poem about it in the 'Excelsior Magazine' wants to see it. Why, it would pay the Green Springs hotel-keeper to buy it up for his customers.

But I s'pose you reckon to keep it — along with the poetess — in your famerly?"

Although Mr. Bowers long considered this speech as the happiest and most brilliant effort of his life, its immediate effect was not, perhaps, all that could be desired. The widow turned upon him a restrained and darkening face. Cynthia half rose with an appealing "Oh, mar!" and Bob and Eunice, having apparently pinched each other to the last stage of endurance, retired precipitately from the room in a prolonged giggle.

"I have not yet thought of disposing of the Summit woods, Mr. Bowers," said Mrs. Delatour coldly, "but if I should do so, I will consult you. You must excuse the children, who see so little company, they are quite unmanageable when strangers are present. Cynthia, *will* you see if the servants have looked after Mr. Bowers's horse? You know Bob is not to be trusted."

There was clearly nothing else for Mr. Bowers to do but to take his leave, which he did respectfully, if not altogether hopefully. But when he had reached the lane, his horse shied from the unwonted spectacle of Bob, swinging his hat, and apparently awaiting him, from the fork of a wayside sapling.

"Hol' up, mister. Look here!"

Mr. Bowers pulled up. Bob dropped into the road, and, after a backward glance over his shoulder, said: —

"Drive 'longside the fence in the shadder." As Mr. Bowers obeyed, Bob approached the wheels of the buggy in a manner half shy, half mysterious. "You wanter buy them Summit woods, mister?"

"Well, per'aps, sonny. Why?" smiled Mr. Bowers.

"Coz I 'll tell ye suthin'. Don't you be fooled into allowin' that Cynthia wrote that po'try. She did n't — no more 'n Eunice nor me. Mar kinder let ye think it, coz she don't want folks to think *she* did it. But mar wrote

that po'try herself; wrote it out o' them thar woods — all by herself. Thar 's a heap more po'try thar, you bet, and jist as good. And she 's the one that kin write it — you hear me? That 's my mar, every time! You buy that thar wood, and get mar to run it for po'try, and you 'll make your pile, sure! I ain't lyin'. You 'd better look spry: thar 's another feller snoopin' round yere — only he barked up the wrong tree, and thought it was Cynthia, jist as you did."

"Another feller?" repeated the astonished Bowers.

"Yes; a rig'lar sport. He was orful keen on that po'try, too, you bet. So you 'd better hump yourself afore somebody else cuts in. Mar got a hundred dollars for that pome, from that editor feller and his pardner. I reckon that 's the rig'lar price, eh?" he added, with a sudden suspicious caution.

"I reckon so," replied Mr. Bowers blankly. "But — look here, Bob! Do you mean to say it was your mother — your *mother*, Bob, who wrote that poem? Are you sure?"

"D' ye think I 'm lyin'?" said Bob scornfully. "Don't *I* know? Don't I copy 'em out plain for her, so as folks won't know her handwrite? Go 'way! you 're loony!" Then, possibly doubting if this latter expression were strictly diplomatic with the business in hand, he added in half reproach, half apology, "Don't ye see I don't want ye to be fooled into losin' yer chance o' buying up that Summit wood? It 's the cold truth I 'm tellin' ye."

Mr. Bowers no longer doubted it. Disappointed as he undoubtedly was at first, — and even self-deceived, — he recognized in a flash the grim fact that the boy had stated. He recalled the apparition of the sad-faced woman in the wood — her distressed manner, that to his inexperienced mind now took upon itself the agitated trembling of dis-

turbed mystic inspiration. A sense of sadness and remorse succeeded his first shock of disappointment.

"Well, are ye going to buy the woods?" said Bob, eying him grimly. "Ye 'd better say."

Mr. Bowers started. "I should n't wonder, Bob," he said, with a smile, gathering up his reins. "Anyhow, I 'm comin' back to see your mother this afternoon. And meantime, Bob, you keep the first chance for me."

He drove away, leaving the youthful diplomatist standing with his bare feet in the dust. For a minute or two the young gentleman amused himself by a few light saltatory steps in the road. Then a smile of scornful superiority, mingled, perhaps, with a sense of previous slights and unappreciation, drew back his little upper lip, and brightened his mottled cheek.

"I 'd like ter know," he said darkly, "what this yer God-forsaken famerly would do without *me!*"

CHAPTER V

It is to be presumed that the editor and Mr. Hamlin mutually kept to their tacit agreement to respect the impersonality of the poetess, for during the next three months the subject was seldom alluded to by either. Yet in that period White Violet had sent two other contributions, and on each occasion Mr. Hamlin had insisted upon increasing the honorarium to the amount of his former gift. In vain the editor pointed out the danger of this form of munificence; Mr. Hamlin retorted by saying that if he refused he would appeal to the proprietor, who certainly would not object to taking the credit of this liberality. "As to the risks," concluded Jack sententiously, "I 'll take them; and as far as you 're concerned, you certainly get the worth of your money."

Indeed, if popularity was an indiction, this had become suddenly true. For the poetess's third contribution, without changing its strong local color and individuality, had been an unexpected outburst of human passion — a love-song, that touched those to whom the subtler meditative graces of the poetess had been unknown. Many people had listened to this impassioned but despairing cry from some remote and charmed solitude, who had never read poetry before, who translated it into their own limited vocabulary and more limited experience, and were inexpressibly affected to find that they, too, understood it; it was caught up and echoed by the feverish, adventurous, and unsatisfied life that filled that day and time. Even the editor was surprised and frightened. Like most cultivated

men, he distrusted popularity: like all men who believe in their own individual judgment, he doubted collective wisdom. Yet now that his protégée had been accepted by others, he questioned that judgment and became her critic. It struck him that her sudden outburst was strained; it seemed to him that in this mere contortion of passion the sibyl's robe had become rudely disarranged. He spoke to Hamlin, and even approached the tabooed subject.

"Did you see anything that suggested this sort of business in — in — that woman — I mean in — your pilgrimage, Jack?"

"No," responded Jack gravely. "But it 's easy to see she 's got hold of some hay-footed fellow up there in the mountains with straws in his hair, and is playing him for all he 's worth. You won't get much more poetry out of her, I reckon."

It was not long after this conversation that one afternoon, when the editor was alone, Mr. James Bowers entered the editorial room with much of the hesitation and irresolution of his previous visit. As the editor had not only forgotten him, but even dissociated him with the poetess, Mr. Bowers was fain to meet his unresponsive eye and manner with some explanation.

"Ye disremember my comin' here, Mr. Editor, to ask you the name o' the lady who called herself 'White Violet,' and how you allowed you could n't give it, but would write and ask for it?"

Mr. Editor, leaning back in his chair, now remembered the occurrence, but was distressed to add that the situation remained unchanged, and that he had received no such permission.

"Never mind *that*, my lad," said Mr. Bowers gravely, waving his hand. "I understand all that; but ez I 've known the lady ever since, and am now visiting her at her house on the Summit, I reckon it don't make much matter."

It was quite characteristic of Mr. Bowers's smileless earnestness that he made no ostentation of this dramatic retort, nor of the undisguised stupefaction of the editor.

"Do you mean to say that you have met White Violet, the author of these poems?" repeated the editor.

"Which her name is Delatour, — the Widder Delatour, — ez she has herself give me permission to tell you," continued Mr. Bowers, with a certain abstracted and automatic precision that dissipated any suggestion of malice in the reversed situation.

"Delatour! — a widow!" repeated the editor.

"With five children," continued Mr. Bowers. Then, with unalterable gravity, he briefly gave an outline of her condition and the circumstances of his acquaintance with her.

"But I reckoned *you* might have known suthin' o' this; though she never let on you did," he concluded, eying the editor with troubled curiosity.

The editor did not think it necessary to implicate Mr. Hamlin. He said briefly, "I? Oh no!"

"Of course, *you* might not have seen her?" said Mr. Bowers, keeping the same grave, troubled gaze on the editor.

"Of course not," said the editor, somewhat impatient under the singular scrutiny of Mr. Bowers; "and I 'm very anxious to know how she looks. Tell me, what is she like?"

"She is a fine, pow'ful, eddicated woman," said Mr. Bowers, with slow deliberation. "Yes, sir, — a pow'ful woman, havin' grand ideas of her own, and holdin' to 'em." He had withdrawn his eyes from the editor, and apparently addressed the ceiling in confidence.

"But what does she look like, Mr. Bowers?" said the editor, smiling.

"Well, sir, she looks — *like — it!* Yes," — with deliberate caution, — "I should say, just like it."

After a pause, apparently to allow the editor to materialize this ravishing description, he said gently, "Are you busy just now?"

"Not very. What can I do for you?"

"Well, not much for *me*, I reckon," he returned, with a deeper respiration, that was his nearest approach to a sigh, "but suthin' perhaps for yourself and — another. Are you married?"

"No," said the editor promptly.

"Nor engaged to any — young lady?" — with great politeness.

"No."

"Well, mebbe you think it a queer thing for me to say, — mebbe you reckon you *know* it ez well ez anybody, — but it 's my opinion that White Violet is in love with you."

"With me?" ejaculated the editor in a hopeless astonishment that at last gave way to an incredulous and irresistible laugh.

A slight touch of pain passed over Mr. Bowers's dejected face, but left the deep outlines set with a rude dignity. "It 's *so*," he said slowly, "though, as a young man and a gay feller, ye may think it 's funny."

"No, not funny, but a terrible blunder, Mr. Bowers, for I give you my word I know nothing of the lady and have never set eyes upon her."

"No, but she has on *you*. I can't say," continued Mr. Bowers, with sublime *naïveté*, "that I 'd ever recognize you from her description, but a woman o' that kind don't see with her eyes like you and me, but with all her senses to onct, and a heap more that ain't senses as we know 'em. The same eyes that seed down through the brush and ferns in the Summit woods, the same ears that heerd the music of the wind trailin' through the pines, don't see you with my eyes or hear you with my ears. And when she paints you, it 's nat'ril for a woman with that pow'ful mind and

grand idees to dip her brush into her heart's blood for warmth and color. Yer smilin', young man. Well, go on and smile at me, my lad, but not at her. For you don't know her. When you know her story as I do, when you know she was made a wife afore she ever knew what it was to be a young woman, when you know that the man she married never understood the kind o' critter he was tied to no more than ef he 'd been a steer yoked to a Morgan colt, when ye know she had children growin' up around her afore she had given over bein' a sort of child herself, when ye know she worked and slaved for that man and those children about the house — her heart, her soul, and all her pow'ful mind bein' all the time in the woods along with the flickerin' leaves and the shadders, — when ye mind she could n't get the small ways o' the ranch because she had the big ways o' Natur' that made it, — then you 'll understand her."

Impressed by the sincerity of his visitor's manner, touched by the unexpected poetry of his appeal, and yet keenly alive to the absurdity of an incomprehensible blunder somewhere committed, the editor gasped almost hysterically: —

"But why should all this make her in love with *me?*"

"Because ye are both gifted," returned Mr. Bowers, with sad but unconquerable conviction; "because ye 're both, so to speak, in a line o' idees and business that draws ye together, — to lean on each other and trust each other ez pardners. Not that *ye* are ezakly her ekal," he went on, with a return to his previous exasperating *naïveté*, "though I 've heerd promisin' things of ye, and ye 're still young; but in matters o' this kind there is allers one ez hez to be looked up to by the other, — and gin'rally the wrong one. She looks up to you, Mr. Editor, — it 's part of her po'try, — ez she looks down inter the brush and sees more than is plain to you and me. Not," he continued, with

a courteously deprecating wave of the hand, "ez you hain't bin kind to her — mebbe *too* kind. For thar 's the purty letter you writ her, thar 's the perlite, easy, captivatin' way you had with her gals and that boy — hold on!" — as the editor made a gesture of despairing renunciation, — "I ain't sayin' you ain't right in keepin' it to yourself, — and thar 's the extry money you sent her every time. Stop! she knows it was *extry*, for she made a p'int o' gettin' me to find out the market price o' po'try in papers and magazines, and she reckons you 've bin payin' her four hundred per cent. above them figgers — hold on! I ain't sayin' it ain't free and liberal in you, and I 'd have done the same thing; yet *she* thinks" —

But the editor had risen hastily to his feet with flushing cheeks.

"One moment, Mr. Bowers," he said hurriedly. "This is the most dreadful blunder of all. The gift is not mine. It was the spontaneous offering of another who really admired our friend's work, — a gentleman who" — He stopped suddenly.

The sound of a familiar voice, lightly humming, was borne along the passage; the light tread of a familiar foot was approaching. The editor turned quickly towards the open door, — so quickly that Mr. Bowers was fain to turn also.

For a charming instant the figure of Jack Hamlin, handsome, careless, and confident, was framed in the doorway. His dark eyes, with their habitual scorn of his average fellow man, swept superciliously over Mr. Bowers, and rested for an instant with caressing familiarity on the editor.

"Well, sonny, any news from the old girl at the Summit?"

"No-o," hastily stammered the editor, with a half-hysterical laugh. "No, Jack. Excuse me a moment."

"All right; busy, I see. *Hasta mañana.*"

The picture vanished, the frame was empty.

"You see," continued the editor, turning to Mr. Bowers, "there has been a mistake. I" — but he stopped suddenly at the ashen face of Mr. Bowers, still fixed in the direction of the vanished figure.

"Are you ill?"

Mr. Bowers did not reply, but slowly withdrew his eyes, and turned them heavily on the editor. Then, drawing a longer, deeper breath, he picked up his soft felt hat, and, moulding it into shape in his hands as if preparing to put it on, he moistened his dry, grayish lips, and said gently: —

"Friend o' yours?"

"Yes," said the editor — "Jack Hamlin. Of course, you know him?"

"Yes."

Mr. Bowers here put his hat on his head, and, after a pause, turned round slowly once or twice, as if he had forgotten it, and was still seeking it. Finally he succeeded in finding the editor's hand, and shook it, albeit his own trembled slightly. Then he said: —

"I reckon you 're right. There 's bin a mistake. I see it now. Good-by. If you 're ever up my way, drop in and see me." He then walked to the doorway, passed out, and seemed to melt into the afternoon shadows of the hall.

He never again entered the office of the "Excelsior Magazine," neither was any further contribution ever received from White Violet. To a polite entreaty from the editor, addressed first to "White Violet" and then to Mrs. Delatour, there was no response. The thought of Mr. Hamlin's cynical prophecy disturbed him; but that gentleman, preoccupied in filling some professional engagements in Sacramento, gave him no chance to acquire further explanations as to the past or the future. The youthful edi-

tor was at first in despair and filled with a vague remorse of some unfulfilled duty. But, to his surprise, the readers of the magazine seemed to survive their talented contributor, and the feverish life that had been thrilled by her song in two months had apparently forgotten her. Nor was her voice lifted from any alien quarter; the domestic and foreign press that had echoed her lays seemed to respond no longer to her utterance.

It is possible that some readers of these pages may remember a previous chronicle by the same historian wherein it was recorded that the volatile spirit of Mr. Hamlin, slightly assisted by circumstances, passed beyond these voices at the Ranch of the Blessed Fisherman, some two years later. As the editor stood beside the body of his friend on the morning of the funeral, he noticed among the flowers laid upon his bier by loving hands a wreath of white violets. Touched and disturbed by a memory long since forgotten, he was further embarrassed, as the cortége dispersed in the Mission graveyard, by the apparition of the tall figure of Mr. James Bowers from behind a monumental column. The editor turned to him quickly.

"I am glad to see you here," he said awkwardly, and he knew not why; then, after a pause, "I trust you can give me some news of Mrs. Delatour. I wrote to her nearly two years ago, but had no response."

"Thar 's bin no Mrs. Delatour for two years," said Mr. Bowers, contemplatively stroking his beard; "and mebbe that 's why. She 's bin for two years Mrs. Bowers."

"I congratulate you," said the editor; "but I hope there still remains a White Violet, and that, for the sake of literature, she has not given up" —

"Mrs. Bowers," interrupted Mr. Bowers, with singular deliberation, "found that makin' po'try and tendin' to the cares of a growin'-up famerly was irritatin' to the narves. They did n't jibe, so to speak. What Mrs. Bowers wanted

— and what, po'try or no po'try, I 've bin tryin' to give her — was Rest! She 's bin havin' it comfor'bly up at my ranch at Mendocino, with her children and me. Yes, sir " — his eye wandered accidentally to the new-made grave — " you 'll excuse my sayin' it to a man in your profession, but it 's what most folks will find is a heap better than readin' or writin' or actin' po'try — and that 's — Rest! "

OUT OF A PIONEER'S TRUNK

It was a slightly cynical but fairly good-humored crowd that had gathered before a warehouse on Long Wharf in San Francisco one afternoon in the summer of '51. Although the occasion was an auction, the bidders' chances more than usually hazardous, and the season and locality famous for reckless speculation, there was scarcely any excitement among the bystanders, and a lazy, half-humorous curiosity seemed to have taken the place of any zeal for gain.

It was an auction of unclaimed trunks and boxes — the personal luggage of early emigrants — which had been left on storage in hulk or warehouse at San Francisco, while the owner was seeking his fortune in the mines. The difficulty and expense of transport, often obliging the gold-seeker to make part of his journey on foot, restricted him to the smallest impedimenta, and that of a kind not often found in the luggage of ordinary civilization. As a consequence, during the emigration of '49, he was apt on landing to avail himself of the invitation usually displayed on some of the doors of the rude hostelries on the shore: "Rest for the Weary and Storage for Trunks." In a majority of cases he never returned to claim his stored property. Enforced absence, protracted equally by good or evil fortune, accumulated the high storage charges until they usually far exceeded the actual value of the goods; sickness, further emigration, or death also reduced the number of possible claimants, and that more wonderful human frailty — absolute forgetfulness of deposited posses-

sions — combined together to leave the bulk of the property in the custodian's hands. Under an understood agreement they were always sold at public auction after a given time. Although the contents of some of the trunks were exposed, it was found more in keeping with the public sentiment to sell the trunks *locked* and *unopened.* The element of curiosity was kept up from time to time by the incautious disclosures of the lucky or unlucky purchaser, and general bidding thus encouraged — except when the speculator, with the true gambling instinct, gave no indication in his face of what was drawn in this lottery. Generally, however, some suggestion in the exterior of the trunk, a label or initials; some conjectural knowledge of its former owner, or the idea that he might be secretly present in the hope of getting his property back for less than the accumulated dues, kept up the bidding and interest.

A modest-looking, well-worn portmanteau had been just put up at a small opening bid, when Harry Flint joined the crowd. The young man had arrived a week before at San Francisco friendless and penniless, and had been forced to part with his own effects to procure necessary food and lodging while looking for an employment. In the irony of fate that morning the proprietors of a dry-goods store, struck with his good looks and manners, had offered him a situation, if he could make himself more presentable to their fair clients. Harry Flint was gazing half abstractedly, half hopelessly, at the portmanteau without noticing the auctioneer's persuasive challenge. In his abstraction he was not aware that the auctioneer's assistant was also looking at him curiously, and that possibly his dejected and half-clad appearance had excited the attention of one of the cynical bystanders, who was exchanging a few words with the assistant. He was, however, recalled to himself a moment later when the portmanteau was knocked down at fifteen dollars, and considerably startled when the

assistant placed it at his feet with a grim smile. "That 's your property, Fowler, and I reckon you look as if you wanted it back bad."

"But — there 's some mistake," stammered Flint. "I did n't bid."

"No, but Tom Flynn did for you. You see, I spotted you from the first, and told Flynn I reckoned you were one of those chaps who came back from the mines dead-broke. And he up and bought your things for you — like a square man. That 's Flynn's style, if he is a gambler."

"But," persisted Flint, "this never was my property. My name is n't Fowler, and I never left anything here."

The assistant looked at him with a grim, half-credulous, half-scornful smile. "Have it your own way," he said, "but I oughter tell ye, old man, that I 'm the warehouse clerk, and I remember *you*. I 'm here for that purpose. But as that thar valise is bought and paid for by somebody else and given to you, it 's nothing more to me. Take it or leave it."

The ridiculousness of quarreling over the mere form of his good fortune here struck Flint; and as his abrupt benefactor had as abruptly disappeared, he hurried off with his prize. Reaching his cheap lodging-house, he examined its contents. As he had surmised, it contained a full suit of clothing of the better sort, and suitable to his urban needs. There were a few articles of jewelry, which he put religiously aside. There were some letters, which seemed to be of a purely business character. There were a few daguerreotypes of pretty faces, one of which was singularly fascinating to him. But there was another, of a young man, which startled him with its marvelous resemblance *to himself!* In a flash of intelligence he understood it all now. It was the likeness of the former owner of the trunk, for whom the assistant had actually mistaken him! He glanced hurriedly at the envelopes of

the letters. They were addressed to Shelby Fowler, the name by which the assistant had just called him. The mystery was plain now. And for the present he could fairly accept his good luck, and trust to later fortune to justify himself.

Transformed in his new garb, he left his lodgings to present himself once more to his possible employer. His way led past one of the large gambling saloons. It was yet too early to find the dry-goods trader disengaged; perhaps the consciousness of more decent, civilized garb emboldened him to mingle more freely with strangers, and he entered the saloon. He was scarcely abreast of one of the faro tables when a man suddenly leaped up with an oath and discharged a revolver full in his face. The shot missed. Before his unknown assailant could fire again the astonished Flint had closed with him, and instinctively clutched the weapon. A brief but violent struggle ensued. Flint felt his strength failing him, when suddenly a look of astonishment came into the furious eyes of his adversary, and the man's grasp mechanically relaxed. The half-freed pistol, thrown upwards by this movement, was accidentally discharged pointblank into his temples, and he fell dead. No one in the crowd had stirred or interfered.

"You 've done for Australian Pete this time, Mr. Fowler," said a voice at his elbow. He turned gaspingly and recognized his strange benefactor, Flynn. "I call you all to witness, gentlemen," continued the gambler, turning dictatorially to the crowd, "that this man was *first* attacked and was *unarmed.*" He lifted Flint's limp and empty hands and then pointed to the dead man, who was still grasping the weapon. "Come!" He caught the half-paralyzed arm of Flint and dragged him into the street.

"But," stammered the horrified Flint, as he was borne along, "what does it all mean? What made that man attack me?"

"I reckon it was a case of shooting on sight, Mr. Fowler; but he missed it by not waiting to see if you were armed. It was n't the square thing, and you 're all right with the crowd now, whatever he might have had ag'in' you."

"But," protested the unhappy Flint, "I never laid eyes on the man before, and my name is n't Fowler."

Flynn halted, and dragged him in a doorway. "Who the devil are you?" he asked roughly.

Briefly, passionately, almost hysterically, Flint told him his scant story. An odd expression came over the gambler's face.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "I have passed my word to the crowd yonder that you are a dead-broke miner called Fowler. I allowed that you might have had some row with that Sydney duck, Australian Pete, in the mines. That satisfied them. If I go back now, and say it 's a lie, that your name ain't Fowler, and you never knew who Pete was, they 'll jest pass you over to the police to deal with you, and wash their hands of it altogether. You may prove to the police who you are, and how that d— clerk mistook you, but it will give you trouble. And who is there here who knows who you really are?"

"No one," said Flint, with sudden hopelessness.

"And you say you 're an orphan, and ain't got any relations livin' that you 're beholden to?"

"No one."

"Then, take my advice, and *be* Fowler, and stick to it! Be Fowler until Fowler turns up, and thanks you for it; for you 've saved Fowler's life, as Pete would never have funked and lost his grit over Fowler as he did with you; and you 've a right to his name."

He stopped, and the same odd, superstitious look came into his dark eyes.

"Don't you see what all that means? Well, I 'll tell

you. You 're in the biggest streak of luck a man ever had. You 've got the cards in your own hand! They spell 'Fowler!' Play Fowler first, last, and all the time. Good-night, and good luck, *Mr. Fowler.*"

The next morning's journal contained an account of the justifiable killing of the notorious desperado and ex-convict, Australian Pete, by a courageous young miner by the name of Fowler. "An act of firmness and daring," said the "Pioneer," "which will go far to counteract the terrorism produced by those lawless ruffians."

In his new suit of clothes, and with this paper in his hand, Flint sought the dry-goods proprietor — the latter was satisfied and convinced. That morning Harry Flint began his career as salesman and as "Shelby Fowler."

From that day Shelby Fowler's career was one of uninterrupted prosperity. Within the year he became a partner. The same miraculous fortune followed other ventures later. He was mill owner, mine owner, bank director — a millionaire! He was popular, the reputation of his brief achievement over the desperado kept him secure from the attack of envy and rivalry. He never was confronted by the real Fowler. There was no danger of exposure by others — the one custodian of his secret, Tom Flynn, died in Nevada the year following. He had quite forgotten his youthful past, and even the more recent lucky portmanteau; remembered nothing, perhaps, but the pretty face of the daguerreotype that had fascinated him. There seemed to be no reason why he should not live and die as Shelby Fowler.

His business a year later took him to Europe. He was entering a train at one of the great railway stations of London, when the porter, who had just deposited his portmanteau in a compartment, reappeared at the window followed by a young lady in mourning.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I handed you the wrong portmanteau. That belongs to this young lady. This is yours."

Flint glanced at the portmanteau on the seat before him. It certainly was not his, although it bore the initials "S. F." He was mechanically handing it back to the porter, when his eyes fell on the young lady's face. For an instant he stood petrified. It was the face of the daguerreotype. "I beg pardon," he stammered, "but are these your initials?" She hesitated, perhaps it was the abruptness of the question, but he saw she looked confused.

"No. A friend's."

She disappeared into another carriage, but from that moment Harry Flint knew that he had no other aim in life but to follow this clue and the beautiful girl who had dropped it. He bribed the guard at the next station, and discovered that she was going to York. On their arrival he was ready on the platform to respectfully assist her. A few words disclosed the fact that she was a fellow countrywoman, although residing in England, and at present on her way to join some friends at Harrogate. Her name was West. At the mention of his, he again fancied she looked disturbed.

They met again and again; the informality of his introduction was overlooked by her friends, as his assumed name was already respectably and responsibly known beyond California. He thought no more of his future. He was in love. He even dared to think it might be returned; but he felt he had no right to seek that knowledge until he had told her his real name and how he came to assume another's. He did so alone — scarcely a month after their first meeting. To his alarm, she burst into a flood of tears, and showed an agitation that seemed far beyond any apparent cause. When she had partly recovered, she said in a low, frightened voice: —

"You are bearing *my brother's* name. But it was a name

that the unhappy boy had so shamefully disgraced in Australia that he abandoned it; and as he lay upon his death-bed, the last act of his wasted life was to write an imploring letter begging me to change mine, too. For the infamous companion of his crime who had first tempted, then betrayed him, had possession of all his papers and letters, many of them from *me*, and was threatening to bring them to our Virginia home and expose him to our neighbors. Maddened by desperation, the miserable boy twice attempted the life of the scoundrel, and might have added that blood guiltiness to his other sins had he lived. I *did* change my name to my mother's maiden one, left the country, and have lived here to escape the revelations of that desperado, should he fulfill his threat."

In a flash of recollection Flint remembered the startled look that had come into his assailant's eye after they had clinched. It was the same man who had too late realized that his antagonist was not Fowler. "Thank God! you are forever safe from any exposure from that man," he said gravely, "and the name of Fowler has never been known in San Francisco save in all respect and honor. It is for you to take back — fearlessly and alone!"

She did — but not alone, for she shared it with her husband.

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